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**Organizational Exit Dynamics in Times of Turbulence:
Let Me Tell You the Story of How My High Hopes Were Let Down**

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**Organizational Exit Dynamics in Times of Turbulence:
Let Me Tell You the Story of How My High Hopes Were Let Down**

by

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Organizational Exit Dynamics in Times of Turbulence: Let Me Tell You the Story of How My High Hopes Were Let Down

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Employees face many challenges as they attempt to fulfill the often intense and conflicting expectations of their professional roles within the culture of an organization for which they perform paid work. These demands include traversing a consistent stream of organizational change (Lewis, 2011), navigating complex coworker relationships (Sias, 2009), and meeting the often intense and even abusive demands of organizational managers and leaders (Caldwell & Canuto-Carranco, 2010). As a result of this cultural intensity, organizational members can begin considering exit (Jablin, 1987, 2001) very early in their tenure. This study explores Jablin's Model of Assimilation (1987, 2001) as a framework for identifying the types of events, observations and concerns that facilitate exit-related sensemaking (Weick, 1995) and, ultimately, a decision to leave an organization. Findings indicate that organizational exit (Jablin, 1987, 2001) is not simply a response to a single "straw that broke the camel's back" event. Rather, organizational exit is a complex, evolving process resulting from a web of observations and experiences occurring over time within the organization.

Based on interviews with 61 people who voluntarily left an organization in a post-recession economy (2010—2014), findings indicate surprising similarities and differences across industries in both the organizational factors leading up to exit and

individuals' exit experiences. By tracing the origins of exit back through the socialization processes experienced by exiting organizational members, this study fills a gap in organizational exit research, defining exit not as a discrete end-stage event, but rather as an ongoing, highly communicative and personalized process based on recursive loops of sensemaking (Weick, 1995) that build over the course of a member's tenure, resulting in a choice to leave the organization.

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Chapter 1: Introduction & Background

Organizations are moving towards less traditional structures — favoring “flatter” or “leaner” structures— while expecting employees to figure out their roles and “make it work.” This new approach to organizing people is seen in several new organizational systems, including the Results Only Work Environment (ROWE), sociocracy, Freedom at Work, and the Morning Star Self Management system—as well as the latest form of “unstructuring,” holocracy (Greenfield, 2015). Holocracy completely eliminates traditional top-down hierarchy—including the people manager role—and replaces it with constantly evolving, self-managing, project-based teams (Greenfield, 2015).

Tony Hsieh, CEO of online retailer, Zappos, recently transitioned his 4,000 employee company from traditional hierarchy to the holocracy structure, which uses meetings not to discuss and organize work, but rather to resolve specific “tensions” preventing teams from getting work done. Most recently, in a desire to fast-track his company’s focus to a fully-functioning holocracy, Hsieh offered three months of severance pay to any employee who was not comfortable with the holocracy structure and wished to work somewhere else. Below is an excerpt of the March 2015 all-employee email he sent clarifying the holocracy structure—specifically the absence of managers in holocracy—and explaining “the offer” made to employees no longer wishing to work at Zappos:

Historically at Zappos the "manager" position contained a number of different responsibilities including people management, overseeing and approving decisions, budgeting, and professional development, as well as direct work on projects and goals for the good of the team. The people management aspects of the manager role are valuable in what the book refers to as Orange and Green organizations, but do not make sense in a self-organized and self-managing Teal organization. While we know that the full role of managers will no longer be necessary in a Teal organization, we’re also looking forward to seeing what new

exciting contributions will come from the employees who were previously managers.

All former managers who remain in good standing will still keep their salary through the end of 2015 even though their day-to-day work that formerly involved more traditional management will need to change. A new circle called Reinventing Yourself has been created to help guide former managers to new roles that might be a good match for their passions, skills, and experience. Hollie is the lead link of that new circle. (On our backend HRIS system, employees will still have "reporting" relationships solely for the purposes of maintaining compliance (e.g. SOX) requirements because we are part of a public company. This compliance requirement will be largely invisible to most employees and should not be confused with legacy reporting structures which will no longer exist.)

However well-intentioned by organizational leaders, organizational restructuring that removes or minimizes formal structures and replaces them with the expectation that members define, navigate and fulfill multiple, changing, project-based roles can generate role ambiguity for both new and tenured members. Role ambiguity is defined as the "level of uncertainty surrounding the expectations about a single role" (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1990, p. 191) and can be a source of stress and uncertainty for organizational members. As Hsieh's email illustrates, such large scale change is also a source of power for organizational leaders, who know the rules of the game (a metaphor sometimes used to describe the holocracy process) better than their employees and can use the new rules to discipline members who are not making change happen fast enough or simply not living up to leadership's expectations for the new system.

Chloe, a 24-year old physical therapist interviewed for the current study, experienced role ambiguity and related tensions as she tried to navigate two ambiguous roles—the one for which she was formally hired, and a second for which the organization wanted her to fulfill, yet had failed to formally place her within, instead expecting her to perform both roles.

The hard thing was—and this was something that I knew was part of the job—even though it was never my favorite part of the job, is that I always had a crazy schedule. One night I had to work until 9:00 at night. Then the next day, I'd go in early in the morning and then I'd have like three hours off in the middle of the day and then I'd work until 9:00 at night again. It was just nuts. It was like nothing was ever set in stone. I was flipping from one second to the next, which was okay when I didn't have a kid. But after I had a kid, my perspective on that changed a little.

Q: How did that influence your perspective on these things happening at work?

It made it hard just because I was feeling stressed out about stuff. And then I'd come home and I'd be stressed out. It was just a lot of stress. I was just so overwhelmed. I was losing hair. I had a receding hairline like an old man. I kid you not. I had to pull it in front of my face more because it was going in on the sides.

This type of ambiguity and resulting stress are just two of the many ongoing, overlapping factors that can contribute to an individual's initial consideration of organizational exit. This organizational exit study explores these and other dynamics, based on interviews with 61 individuals from across a variety of industries, job types and job levels. The findings of this study add value to the discipline of organizational communication, and specifically to our understanding of socialization processes, by highlighting exit-related communication dynamics embedded in the entire socialization process, beginning in its earliest stages, before the member even “sets foot” in the organization. The identification and description of early stage deidentification, which occurs as an individual begins separating from an organizational role identity (Ashforth, 2001), highlights how exit is not simply a discrete end-stage of socialization. Rather, exit is itself a process that can occur within each stage of socialization as a result of organizational events and messages that stimulate exit-related sensemaking for an individual. The result of this sensemaking is a turning away from the organization and a focus on personalizing one's organizational experience through exit-related planning. In

this way exit is an eventful, highly personalized process that can have a long-lasting impact on an individual's job and career-related sensemaking. By detailing and describing the various factors contributing to exit throughout the socialization process.

Organizational communication factors that contribute to an employee's exit process throughout each phase of Jablin's Model of Assimilation (1987, 2001) are identified and traced, as are the employee's sensemaking of these individual events and the compounding effects of these experiences over time. This study also identifies similarities and differences in exit as experienced across a variety of organizations and industries. In contrast to socialization studies that focus on a particular group of people, specific organization, or a specific stage of the socialization process, this study provides insight into how members across various organizations and industries—including the public and private sectors—experience the organizational dynamics of the exit process.

Although organizational change brings the potential for innovation, it also disrupts existing structures and relationships in ways not fully accounted for in previous socialization and organizational change research. As with society and the media in general, organizational communication research often privileges a focus on the innovation potentially created by change (Lewis, 2013) without an eye for the various destructive forms of organizational communication that can take hold during times of change (Lutgen-Sandvik & Sypher, 2009), whether that change is a sudden event, or a gradual unfolding of change (Hom, Mitchell, Lee & Griffeth, 2012; Lee, Mitchell & Wise, 1994, 1999).

Additionally, the organizational exit model first documented by Jablin in 1987 has remained largely unchanged within the organizational communication literature, representing fertile ground for new organizational communication research (Kramer and Miller, 2013). Now, almost 30 years later, new factors of global corporate influence,

hyper focus on profitization of every business function and the continuous drive for change created by the focus, as well as a disinvestment in the public sector institutions (including the colleges charged with preparing the youngest cohort of entrants into the paid workforce), create the need for a fresh look at not only organizational exit, but the entire socialization process.

Recent research has confirmed that different cohorts of employees can indeed have very different experiences related to organizational socialization (Dailey, 2014; Joshi, Dencker, Franz, & Martocchi, 2010) based on sensemaking rooted in several factors. These factors include previous employment experience, the presence and quality of socialization support programs like new hire (Stephens & Dailey, 2012) and leadership training, and encounter experiences with individual coworkers, teams, and supervisors, as well as with formal organizational policies and informal practices.

This study offers significant practical implications, helping organizations identify new opportunities for creating and maintaining employee-focused cultures that support and encourage employee voice (Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers, & Mainous, 1988; Van Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003)—priorities especially important during times of organizational change and/or difficulty. Similarly, these findings can help business function managers and supervisors identify the daily tactical communication and professional relationship-building skills that can help them feel more confident and be more effective in their vital front line roles. This study underscores the importance of creating and using processes that hold individual members—regardless of job title or position—accountable for abusive behavior, given the organizational and personal costs associated with allowing one employee to wreak havoc on an organization. Finally, it is critical to note that these are not issues and opportunities that occur in isolation. Most participants of this study did not experience just one problematic issue listed above, they experienced several issues

concurrently, highlighting the need for increased attention to organizational culture dynamics (Keyton, 2013).

TERMINOLOGY

To understand the broader societal context examined by this study, this section explains the historical and cultural time period in which this study of organizational exit was conducted. Specific terminology choices made for the study are also explained and defined.

In this study of organizational exit (Jablin, 1987, 2001), interviewees had all voluntarily left, or exited, a position of paid work (i.e., a “job”) between January 2010 and early 2014. This timeframe followed a period of economic recession in the U.S. marked by intense restructuring of organizations in terms of layoffs, mergers and acquisitions (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, February 2012), and the more micro level restructuring of teams, policies and systems. Societal level discourse about organizations was characterized by an intense focus on “productivity” and “efficiency” defined in economic terms, specifically the goal of perpetually increasing profits. The goal of finding new ways to control employees and drive increasing levels of productivity continues, with employers creating new ways to facilitate “transparency” of employee productivity data. One firm, BetterWorks, gets employees to set productivity goals with their manager, then publicly share their progress on an internal “dashboard” through they earn badges and likes from peers, similar to an online video game or social media site (Dougherty and Hardy, March 2015).

Officially, labor productivity is defined as the “ratio of the output of goods and services to the labor hours devoted to the production of that output” (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, February 2012, p. 16), which is achieved, in short, by producing more

product with as few people as possible. As a result, non-profit oriented work processes core to the functioning of an organization was eliminated or outsourced, particularly in large national and multinational corporations who had the option of using third party vendors (Gossett, 2006) and less expensive, less regulated overseas labor.

Additionally, “free market” discourse (Aune, 2001; Conrad, 2011) became increasingly prevalent in the U.S. media during the time of this study, driving pro-corporate messages to the public focused on the need reduce taxes on “job creators” (Bernstein, 2014) and minimize or eliminate regulations on corporations, while significantly disinvesting in public resources such as schools and transportation resources. Nationwide in 2011, more states awarded over \$80 billion in tax incentives to entice companies to set up shop in their respective states. In 2011, the state of Texas cut \$5.4 billion from its state education budget, while granting approximately \$19 billion in tax incentive, the highest amount of tax incentives in the nation. Texas claimed that its steady job growth justified these give-aways, yet in 2011 Texas ranked third in the country for the highest number of hourly jobs paying at or below minimum wage, and had the 11th highest poverty rate in the nation (Story, 2012a; Story, 2012b). Additionally, the incentives do not buy a company’s loyalty. Amazon.com closed a distribution warehouse north of Dallas in 2011 after refusing to pay a \$269 million state tax bill and General Motors closed manufacturing plants in a host of Midwestern states after receiving local and state incentives for years—in addition to a \$50 billion bailout from the federal government in 2009 (Story, 2012b).

This perverse incentive system sets pits states against states and cities against cities in an effort to attract or retain companies employing hundreds, or even thousands, of local residents. Corporations are not shy about pitting local governments against each other, and several firms exist solely to help companies locate states offering the best

incentives (Story, 2012a). In 2011, Kansas lured the AMC Entertainment headquarters from its neighbor Missouri. Kansas then reduced its state education budget by \$104 million (Story, 2012b). Just months later, the Applebee's restaurant headquarters moved from Missouri to Kansas. These few examples illustrate the chaos of a hyper profit-driven system. The following section defines additional concepts and terminology that serve as a framework for understanding the organizational processes, relationships, and outcomes of highlighted in the current study.

National Economic Recession

Organizational exit is influenced not only by the events *within* organizations but also by the *broader* economic environment. Significant economic and structural change can impact organizational structures, through both the discourse and material means (Lewis, 2011). The National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), which officially tracks recessions in U.S., defines a recession as a “significant decline in economic activity spread across the economy, lasting more than a few months, normally visible in production, employment, real income, and other indicators” (NBER, 2011). The most recent U.S. economic recession began in December 2007 and lasted through June 2009, making it the nation's longest recession since World War II (NBER, January 2012). As a result, many organizations, particularly large corporate organizations, went through not one, but several rounds of structural changes during this extended time of economic difficulty. Additionally, more U.S. businesses closed permanently between December 2007 and March 2009—a total of 235,000—than opened in this same period, resulting in the largest net decrease in number of businesses in the U.S. since NBER began tracking this statistic in 1992 (NBER, January 2012). Such dramatic changes during the 2008 recession—most notably the decrease in alternative employment options—served to

intensify, prolong and complicate employees' exit-related sense making processes (Jablin 2001; Weick, 1995) related to the organization they work for and their own sense of professional identity (Lammers, Atouba, & Carlson, 2013; Lammers and Garcia, 2009).

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) explains that voluntary exit (termed *quits* by the BLS) tends to rise when there is a perception that another job is available, and tends to fall when there is a perception that jobs are scarce. Between November 2008 and January 2010—the period representing the middle to the end of the recent US recession as defined and documented by NBER—layoffs and discharges outnumbered quits. In February 2010 (near the beginning of the time period covered in this study), there were 1.9 million quits, well below the 2.8 million quits BLS reported in December 2007, the first month of the recent U.S. recession (NBER, 2011). As such, the timeframe on which this study focuses (from 2010 to 2014) provides a unique opportunity to examine organizational structural change *as organizational communication*. As the statistics listed above illustrate, tough economic conditions contributed to an overall employee reticence to leave from 2007 through 2009, creating an extended period of exit-related sensemaking leading up to an exit event between 2010 and 2014 once the economy began to improve (at least for some). Earlier studies have looked at employees' perceptions of formal change communication and related conversations (Laster, 2010), as well as one's communication choices immediately surrounding an exit event (Klatzke, 2008; Klotz, 2013) but have not focused on messages employees receive from the organization and other members and how related sensemaking about the organization contributes to an exit decision.

Employees, Managers and Leaders

Since this study focuses on examining organizational exit related to paid work (as opposed to unpaid, volunteer work), non-manager and non-leader/executive participants are referred to as *employees* when this term is most appropriate for highlighting the power differences that exist for individuals who are not a manager or leader/executive. This is an important distinction given that, while the organizational socialization literature often uses the term *members* generically to refer to everyone who belongs to an organization (regardless of title or level of authority), this study reveals many communication issues rooted in the power differences that exist among members based on their formal position and title within the organization for which they are performing paid work.

Furthermore, among individuals who do have higher levels of power and authority, this study delineates individuals by their level of authority in the organization. The term *manager* refers to all first-line “supervisors” within the organization, which can include the job titles of *lead*, *supervisor*, and *manager*. While there can be a slight distinction in the power level among these titles—with team leads and supervisors having less authority and power than a manager in the organizational hierarchy, staff reductions and the flattening of organizational structures means that individuals may have only one individual—a team lead/supervisor *or* a manager who is responsible for “supervising” their day to work, providing direction and evaluating the quality of their work. However, some individuals may indeed have both a supervisor and a manager (or report to more than one manager—a corporate concept typically known in practice as *matrixed management*), and when this arrangement is reflected in participants’ narratives, the terms *team lead*, *supervisor* and *manager* are used as shared directly by participants in order to accurately reflect participants’ perceptions and experiences.

Additionally, the term *leader* refers to individuals with power and authority greater than that of a manager. For the purpose of this study, a leader refers to individuals who have a job title of director, vice president or C-level executive. This is different than how *leader* is sometimes used within the organizational communication literature, as in Graen and Uhl-Bien's (1995) leader-member exchange literature, which refers to the leadership communication style used by any organizational member regardless of their formal job title within an organization. Also, the term *supervisor* is often used generically in organizational communication literature to refer to all superior-subordinate relationships, which fails to fully account for the power dynamics embedded in organizational hierarchies.

Given the role of organizational structure and the power afforded leaders over managers and lower level member in this study, the term *leader* refers to those with the highest levels of power and authority in organization as contained in their job title and/or referenced by participants. One final note related to leaders, based on their job title, some participants' direct managers were leaders in the organization for which they worked (for example, a participant who was senior manager and reported to a vice president). In these cases, when a participant is talking about their relationship with the person who manages them, the term manager is used. *Leader* is used when individuals are referring to those with high levels of authority who are not their direct managers, as in the "the leaders of the company."

As these examples illustrate, differences in power and authority are rooted in job titles in a way that is not often accurately differentiated within the organizational communication literature, but which is critical to understand organizational functioning, particularly in the context of the current study. Finally, the terms *member* (i.e., organizational members) and *participants* (i.e., individuals interviewed for the study) are

also used to reference everyone interviewed in the study, but only at times when job title-based power differences are not material to the issues or experiences being discussed.

PREVIEW

The current study will use grounded theory methodology and the interview method to explore individuals' experiences within changing structures, as well as their perceptions of the indirect organizational messages generated during times of structural change. The interview method allowed for more detailed, in-depth exploration and detailing of deidentification (Ashforth, 2001), a step in the process of "reverse socialization" (Browning, personal communication, April 2012), that can occur when an individual stays with an organization while wishing to leave. As the interview results of this study underscore, socialization is not always a positive, forward-moving experience. Furthermore, when it comes to voluntary exit, every exit is a "planned exit" (Davis and Myers, 2012) from the *individual member's* perspective. In this way, exit planning process is an example of how individual members can and do exhibit agency in an effort to personalize their socialization experience, challenging the messages and expectations of the organization. This form of exit-related personalization is an explicit response to confusion, dissatisfaction—and even resentment—resulting from direct treatment, observation of how colleagues are treated, and/or organizational decision-making that appears to violate the organization's own espoused values, to name just a few factors highlighted by the findings of this study. This member sensemaking, and the act of leaving the organization, marks a highly personalized exit process. Furthermore, an individual's exit experience often offers a final surprising, and frequently negative, experience for members—solidifying their sensemaking related to not only the organization they are exiting, but also to the meaning and purpose of work in their lives.

As indicated by pilot data collected during the summer of 2012 (Pastorek, 2012), this reverse socialization and deidentification (Ashforth, 2001) process is typically not a singular event, but a series of smaller occurrences, exchanges and individual sensemaking (Weick, 1995) that occurs over an extended period to time, generating disengagement and, eventually organizational exit. Given the broader economic climate and internal organizational changes within which many organizations operated during the timeframe under study, it is the intent of this study to explore the sensemaking (Weick, 1995) and communication processes individuals navigate before, during—and even after—an exit event, particularly for exits that occur in a time of broader economic and organizational turbulence (Kramer, Dougherty Pierce, 2004; Lewis 2011; Sias, Krone, & Jablin, 2002).

Dissertation Structure

This dissertation is largely organized around six super-axial codes detailing the major areas of exit-related sensemaking. To provide background and context, chapter two reviews relevant literature and chapter three details the method used to conduct this study. The following six chapters detail the major factors contributing to organizational exit: sensemaking (Chapter 4), the selfish system (Chapter 5), leadership (Chapter 6), management (Chapter 7), coworkers (Chapter 8), and work and organizational change (Chapter 9). Finally, Chapter 10 lays out a new model of organizational exit and Chapter 11 defines limitations and directions for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

“I think you’re going to lose middles. People talk about the disappearing middle class; there’s no more middle management; and mid-size organizational really don’t exist anymore. More importantly, there’ll be a lot of chronic ambiguity...All you can do is engage in transient moments of sensemaking” -- Karl Weick, April 1996, Wired magazine interview, describing the future of organizations.

Starting a new job is an important personal transition filled with the promise of new possibilities. After researching a potential new employer using various sources - ranging from the company’s own website to Google, Facebook and LinkedIn; to discussions with family, friends and colleagues (Dailey, 2014); and conversations with various company representatives and employees during the hiring and interview process – organizational newcomers choose their new job based on perceived sense of fit with the work, mission and values of the organization. Newcomers also anticipate opportunities to develop new skills, contribute to an organizational mission that is meaningful to them, and collaborate with new coworkers, managers and leaders whom they anticipate will support their goals, help them develop professionally, and maybe even become a close personal friend or professional mentor. An exciting time indeed.

Unfortunately, this excitement can be short-lived. Employees in organizations today must navigate often turbulent organizational structures and working conditions. Under constant pressure to increase profitability and “productivity” (i.e., increasing profits, while reducing costs and liabilities), organizations now regularly implement changes to organizational structures through mergers, downsizings and restructurings, often removing enabling structures and dismantling working relationships in the process. Change is “the new normal” is a now a well-known cultural idiom in the U.S., and the capacity to not only adapt to, but “manage,” a steady stream of change (Lewis, 2011) is now an expected workplace skill. However, the size, frequency and impact of constant

organizational change can be intense for organizational members, particularly those new to the paid workforce and those new to a particular organization, who lack the historical and organizational context necessary to understand and successfully navigate change in a particular organization (Lewis, 2011). The resulting shifts in relationships across the organization (Sias, 2009) is just one source of the ambiguity (Weick, 1995) created by the change. The impact of these changes may be amplified by a lack of appropriate organizational attention to the confusion and fear change generates—in addition to the material changes to working conditions and work processes. This lack of support is a form of power that privileges organizations, although also potentially serving to silence dissent (Kassing, 1998, 1997) among employees concerned with their job security.

Change can also disrupt existing sources of member sensemaking (Weick, 1995; Lewis, 2011), including workplace relationships (Rollag, 2004; Sias, 2009). Change requires employees to spend time orienting themselves to new organizational structures, while also managing their own questions and emotions (Mumby & Putnam, 1992) about changes in working conditions and how these changes may impact their job performance and job security. In this way, changes—both macro and micro (Sias, Krone, & Jablin, 2002)—are in and of themselves communicative (Louis, 1980) above and beyond any formal change messages distrusted by the organization (Laster, 2008). Change symbolically communicates the values of the organization (Gehman, Trevino, & Garud, 2013; Monin, Noorderhaven, Vaara, & Kron, 2013), as well as an individual's value to an organization.

Organizational change can occur at the micro, meso and/or macro levels (Lewis, 2007; Sias et al., 2002), taking the form of a sudden shock or “jolt” that significantly alters an organization's structure or functioning, such as the unexpected announcement of a merger, restructuring, layoffs, or a strike (Laster, 2008; Meyer, 1982; Rafferty &

Rustubog, 2010). Changes can also be smaller and more gradual, “unfolding” occurrences that impact an individual’s daily work (Lee & Mitchell, 1994, 1999). Whether big or small, sudden or unfolding, organizations today are characterized by a steady stream of changes that restructure systems, processes and relationships across the organization.

Times of ambiguity and change allow organizations to disguise the role of change as an exercise in organizational power, as members are left to question their role within the organization on which their financial livelihood often depends. This financial dependence can make it difficult for workers to feel comfortable to express dissent (Kassing, 2008) or take direct action in support of workplace democracy (Cheney & Cloud, 2006). Factors ranging from corporate globalization, to the US government’s embrace of corporate policies of at-will employment and prioritization of corporate over community interests (Story, 2012a), as well as privatization of public goods and services, all signal a devaluation of labor and democratic decision-making in the workplace (Cheney & Cloud, 2006) and the broader communities within which organizations operate.

As a result, modern workplaces are increasingly characterized by “coercion rather than democratic participation” (Cheney & Cloud, 2006, p. 513) and a focus on achieving a definition of productivity measured by corporations as the amount of monetary profit generated by each employee (Cheney & Cloud, 2006). Such “by the numbers” framing reinforces the myth of rationality (Conrad, 1985), the belief that organizations make decisions objectively in the pursuit of rational, carefully planned goals (Mumby, 1987). This definition of “rational” privileges the organization, failing to consider the irrationality of the power relationships and dependencies that exist between increasingly large corporate organizations, their employees, and the communities within which they

operate. The myth of rationality also serves to dismiss and discredit the rationality of individual members' questions, concerns and suggestions. In this way, Deetz (1992) asserts that practices inside organizations "colonize" other meaning-making institutions, including family, church and community. This outside organizational influence marginalizes discussion regarding the need for, and benefits of, authentic workplace participation, workplace policies that would more aptly allow workers to integrate their personal and professional lives.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

Organizational structure can be quite complex, consisting of hierarchies, technologies, and communication patterns—as well as the goals and priorities of the institution and its leaders. Communication theorists have long recognized the role structures play in shaping communication within organizations. Taylor and Van Every's (2011) concept of thirdness names the powerful, yet often unrecognized influence organizational structures play in the daily recursive processes that create meaning, reinforce institutional norms and provide the context in which organizational members make decisions, take action and communicate with one another:

“The organization is thus, at one and the same time, immaterial (a reason) and materialized, a tangible presence in the world of human actors, rendered visible there by its artifactual extensions, starting with the people who voice its intentions...the organization recruits its agents, and thus transmutes itself into a powerful social actor and material presence...” (p. 34).

Taylor and Van Every (2000) describe communication as constituting the “site and surface” (introduction, p. x) of an organization, and Czarniawska (2008) uses the term “action net” to describe the ongoing, evolving actions that constitute the day-to-day communicative choices within an organization. These communication-as-organizational

structure metaphors—site, surface and net—add further definition to Giddens’ “duality of structure” concept, which captures the interplay between the structure of an organization and the actions that organizational members take within those structures. Giddens (1984) defines three separate but interrelated components which interact to create this duality: structure, systems, and structuration. Structure is the “recursively organized sets of *rules and resources*...organized as properties of social systems” (p. 25) within an institution. Systems, in turn, are the “*reproduced relations* between actors or collectivities, organized as regular *social practices*” (p. 25). Structuration represents the “*conditions governing the continuity or transmutation of structures*, and therefore the reproduction of social systems” (p. 25). As Giddens (1984) states, “Structure is not external to individuals: as memory traces, and as instantiated in social practices, it is in a certain sense more internal than exterior to their activities” (p. 25).

Despite its macro level viewpoint, structuration theory has served as a helpful framework for understanding organizational practices and outcomes in several previous studies. Scott, Corman and Cheney (1998) used structuration theory to develop a model of organizational identification to explain how organizational members may simultaneously identify with one part of an organization but not the other. These “fluctuating” and “fluid” levels of organizational identification can also be influenced by one’s previous work experience and the quality of new hire training offered to new members (Stephens & Dailey, 2012), among other organizational and individual factors (Scott & Stephens, 2009). Humphreys and Brown (2002) highlighted a similar concept, labeling it “schizo-identification,” a term that metaphorically captures the feeling of discontent and even discomfort that can come from underlying stress and confusion causing different levels of organizational identification. The increasing size and

complexity of organizations today underscores the need to understand how multiple identifications form and how they influence one's overall sense of membership.

Multiple identifications can have harmful effects on organizational – and even industry-wide functioning. Browning and Beyer (1998) found that the semiconductor companies' identification with their own organization, and not the broader U.S. semiconductor industry, brought the U.S. semi-conductor industry dangerously close to extinction in the late 1980s. However, the alliance formed in the face of the market threat from Japanese chip manufacturers united U.S. chip manufacturers and helped save the industry. This example underscores the risk to organizations when members (whether individuals or entire organizations) do not identify with an organization.

Sematech members—U.S. semiconductor manufacturers—united around a common threat in a setting where they were not required to follow existing rules but rather had the freedom to write new rules for collaboration and shared success. However, the existence of different levels of identification—for example, with one's manager, team, business function, and/or office site—does not always end so well. Unlike corporations in a voluntary consortium, individual members do not have the power that entire organizations do. In fact, communication efforts designed to influence individual workers' sense of identification (Stephens & Dailey, 2012) with the whole or part of an organization is just one source of control an organization can have over members. Other control strategies included established rules, shifting bureaucratic structures, and discursive closure (Deetz, 1992). As will be discussed in the following section, each of these control structures is established and maintained through communication.

Communicative Structures of Control

Organizations can use communication to not only inform and engage their workers, but also to control them. An organization has multiple means for exerting control over workers through communication and related rules and processes. Edwards (1981) outlined three forms of organizational control: 1) simple control in the form of direct observation, 2) bureaucratic control in the form of rules and policies, 3) technological control in the form of systems and processes required to be completed through the use of technology. Barker (1993) added a fourth type of control, concertive control, which is achieved through getting employee teams to identify with the organization's mission and values and then make decisions in the best interest of the organizations (rather than themselves) based on that identification. This influence can then be seen in the language members use to talk about their role as individuals and team members within the organization, reflecting the degree to which organizational discourse can influence, or colonize individuals thoughts and actions (Larson & Pepper, 2003; Papa, Mohammed, & Singhal, 1997.)

Rules

Establishing rules—formal or informally—can further strengthen organizational control in unexpected ways. Mumby (1987) defines organizational rules as “humanly constructed systems of norms which provide members with an organizational grammar through which action is framed and contextualized...both enabling and constraining the organization” (p. 123). Rules can be informal or formal, as when they are transformed into organizational policy. Policies then structure and shape member conversations on related topics. In this way, rules and policies not only provide structure to the organization, they also structure members' interactions with one another, further reifying policy as structure. Kirby and Krone (2002) explored how coworker talk and questioning

of one another about taking family leave, particularly regarding male members' potential use of paternity leave policy, constrained members' willingness to utilize family-related benefits available to them. In this example, policy serves as a rule for framing conversation related to issues of work-life balance, thereby limiting alternative considerations.

Rules can ultimately become the culture of an organization, further reifying bureaucracy and preventing change. As a prescriptive cultural tool, rules can be a form of ideological control (Thackaberry, 2004). In a review of three reports analyzing the 1996 Storm King Mountain tragedy in Colorado in which 14 firemen were killed, Thackaberry (2004) found that the organization's rule-based culture served as a form of discursive closure in which the firemen not only focused on following the rules, they also reported hesitancy speaking up when a rule was not followed or other danger was eminent. In this way the safety rules served as a form of discursive closure (Deetz, 1992).

In follow-up meetings sponsored by their organization, firefighters shared their top concern for preventing similar tragedies in the future as the need to "Develop a safety culture that encourages people to think rather than just obey the rules" (emphasis added, Thackaberry, 2004, p. 355). However, in the final report, the firefighters' recommendation was re-interpreted through the organization's existing rule-based paradigm, appearing as, "Goal 22: Develop a safety culture that encourages people to think in the context of safe practices, standards, and procedures" (emphasis added, p. 335)—the phrase "rather than just obey the rules" was, ironically, replaced with references to rules based on the existing organizational safety paradigm. As this case illustrates, even when organizations involve offer members a voice in decision making, the pull towards rationalization of existing organizational rules and norms can lead to discursive closure, further codification of existing rules, and ultimately, maintenance of

the status quo. This process also serves as a violation of members' expectations regarding the expected outcomes of their participation, and can in turn lead to member dissatisfaction, disengagement and organizational exit.

However, although organizations attempt to establish rules and other various mechanisms of control, these means of control only work if a) workers choose to follow them and b) the rules are enforced by organizational policies, leadership and teammates. An updated review of the Mann Gulch tragedy (Whiteman & Cooper, 2011) found that firefighters' deaths were not due to a lack of leadership or dysfunctional team dynamics, but rather a lack of experience in the material ecological conditions the smokejumpers experienced on the ground that day, a lack of perspective which limited their sensemaking abilities and their willingness to trust the one person who recognized both the unique conditions and the appropriate escape strategy. Similar feelings of discombobulation can be perceived by members trying to navigate the ambiguity of workplace structures within more traditional organizations as well.

Shifting bureaucratic forms

In more typical, everyday situations, organizational members may also be able to exert some control over the system—or the ambiguity and power dynamics may serve as another form of control. In her study of communication and control of workers for three temp agencies, Gossett (2006) noted that the bureaucratic rules established by the agency created the appearance of an active bureaucratic control system, but in reality the agencies were understaffed, so their bureaucracy was not enforced. Additionally, the agencies actually had little power over the organizations contracting workers from them, so the agencies focused their control efforts on trying to ensure that temporary staff followed orders from their client and that the workers producing quality work. In short,

the contract workers experienced two sources of control and no communication support – they actually reported often receiving mixed messages from the contract agency and client site management (Gossett, 2006).

This ambiguity in the form of no communication support from either the agency of the firm for whom they were working, left contracted workers confused and with no real outlet for expressing dissent (Kassing, 2011) related to pay discrepancies, maltreatment or advocate for themselves. Hence, Gossett’s observation about the appearance of bureaucratic control, although not central to her argument, is a powerful one. From a control lens, this absence of enforcement is yet another form of bureaucratic control and organizational power. Without an outlet to voice concerns or a reliable contact representing their interests either within or outside the organization for which they worked, workers’ voices were silenced. By allowing ambiguity to thrive by not supporting the bureaucracy it created, through insufficient staffing levels and overworked administrative personnel, the agency further empowered itself and controlled workers.

Discursive closure

An organization’s use of an apparent bureaucracy allows it to silence potential questions from internal members as well as external stakeholders, such as the media and regulators or community groups. Deetz (1992) explains that discursive closure occurs when certain groups are disqualified or denied the right to speak, thereby suppressing conflict. Closure is achieved in these instances by privileging certain discourses and silencing or discrediting others. From this perspective, both real and apparent bureaucracy enables organizations to achieve discursive closure. The presence of formal documents, rules, processes and technologies allows an organization to present itself as organized, thorough and efficient—all valued business characteristics. Symbolic

demonstrations of these bureaucratic structures allow the organization to point to “evidence” of managerial excellence, silencing dissent and framing individuals who don’t “follow the rules” outlined in the apparent bureaucracy as troublemakers or rule breakers. Corporate social responsibility programs and women’s initiatives are two additional examples of bureaucratic programs deployed by organizations that enable corporations to promote the appearance of “doing good,” without doing the deep structural work needed to redefine corporate priorities and giving voice to employees and communities (Cloud, 2007; McWilliams & Siegel, 2001).

Organizations use a variety of strategies to privilege the voice and logic of the organization over that of individual members. Deetz (1992) coined the term discursive closure to describe these strategies. Eight specific forms of discursive closure are common within corporations, each privileging corporate power and silencing voices of dissent: disqualification, naturalization, neutralization, topical avoidance, subjectification of experience, meaning denial and plausible deniability, legitimation and pacification (Deetz, 1992). Organizations achieve this using framing to marginalize issues and individuals deemed problematic, as in the case of sexual harassment (Clair, 1993), as well as through the discourse used to discuss everyday organizational topics. Furthermore, privileging corporate voice and silencing those of workers with direct experience in the day-to-day operations of the corporation can set the stage for discontent within the organization. To combat this possibility, Argyris (1986) outlined how organizations can manufacture systems of chaos, or a “defensive routine” (p. 197) in four steps: 1) design an ambiguous statement that workers recognize as such but will not question, 2) ignore inconsistencies embedded in the message, 3) make the ambiguity and inconsistencies undiscussable, and 4) make the undiscussability undiscussable. Similarly, organizations

may deploy the concept of strategic ambiguity to unite diverse stakeholders around vague, but positive goals as a way to facilitate the change they desire (Eisenberg, 1984).

Coercion and abuse

At the extreme, cultures that thrive within the walls of control and discipline built on a foundation of ambiguity and the undiscussable can lead to organizational climates that are harmful to the health and well-being of members. Structural changes to organizations in recent years—namely the shift from hierarchies operating under vertical chain-of-command that managed people—to increasingly cross-functional, self-managed work team structures that manage productivity, and has resulted in shifts in communication practices, patterns, outcomes (Siebold & Shea, 2001). Markham (1996) explored this phenomenon in her study of designers working within a culture built around competing messages of “this job requires autonomy and self-direction” and “attempts at working autonomously will result in explosive consequences” (p. 416).

In some instances, this ambiguity can foster a culture of concertive control, where self-managing teams choose to implement and enforce their own rules and disciplinary actions to reinforce the organization’s values (Barker 1993; Barker & Cheney, 1994). In other situations, the inherent ambiguity in master values, such as U.S. cultural values of “progress” and “leadership,” (Conrad, 2011; Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott, 2008) allows organizations to gain support for mergers and other corporate activities that seem to reflect these values, but ultimately may lack the cultural and material resources to achieve integration that is successful in either financial or cultural terms (Leonardi & Jackson, 2004).

Shifting organizational structures can also pose challenge to employee participation in decision-making, including several problematic factors found in previous

organizational communication research, such as poor network-forming, poor communication systems, lack of role clarity and network-forming opportunities, limited participation in decisions that have a direct impact on job performance, and limited contact with senior management (Conger & Kanungo, 1988, p. 477). Study of organizational communication often highlights managerial perspectives, focusing on formal communication programs adopted voluntarily by organizations, such as quality circles, quality of life programs, employee stock ownership plans, gain sharing plans, and self-directed work teams (Siebold & Shea, 2001). Additionally, many studies take a functionalist perspective, examining variables such as information flow, amount and frequency of information, sources of information and networks (Siebold & Shea, 2001). This functional/managerial perspective fails to account for the degree of employee participation allowed and the social range of participants involved (Siebold & Shea, 2001).

Critical scholars note that none of these voluntary employee programs—similar to external-facing corporate social responsibility programs—are designed to promote equality between line employees and management—rather they are designed to promote the “universalization of managerial interests” (Alvesson & Deetz, 1996, p. 201), rationalizing and privileging existing organizational power structures. In short, these programs do not represent true political participation, but rather are “a tool for handling dissatisfaction, absenteeism, and alienation, problems that are detrimental to the accomplishment of organizational objectives” (Deetz & Kersten, 1983, p. 169). Cheney (1995) highlights that these types of employee participation programs can be used as an attempt to pacify workers, diffuse resistance, and suppress potential opposition.

At an extreme, organizations move beyond tacit silencing of employees to explicit forms of abuse. Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott (2008) identified the communication

strategies indicative of Employee Abusive Organizations (EAOs), which privilege organizational power and authority over the well-being of individual members. EAOs are “hostile environments in which employees experience persistent harassment and fear at work because of the offensive, intimidating, or oppressive atmosphere” (Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott, 2008, p. 305). The authors identify several communicative dimensions of employee abuse across organizational levels, structures and discourses, including: 1) anti-employee policies, 2) laissez-faire managerial oversight, 3) implicit warnings, 4) socialization into aggressive cultures, 5) warnings and horror stories, 6) abusive supervision, 7) abusive co-worker communication, 8) legal environment, 9) a discursive focus on market pressures, 10) individualism meritocracy, 11) reverence for hierarchical power, 12) profit as ultimate goal, and 13) viewing workers as indolent (Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott, 2008).

Discourse within EAOs draws on strategically ambiguous messages (Eisenberg, 1984) that privilege organizational priorities and power structures, while focusing organizational members’ on working to increase the organization’s “efficiency” and “productivity.” This strategy increases worker stress and strain, while tacitly facilitating worker acceptance of reductions in wages and benefits as necessary for “the survival of the organization.” However, this is not to say that workers are devoid of agency in pushing back against corporate rhetoric and the changes to material working conditions it drives. Communication scholars have identified ways in which members both organize themselves and construct their own discourses that directly challenge these corporate and managerial discourses, colonizing not only the organization for which they work but also the union organizations tasked with representing worker interests (Cloud, 2011; Real & Putnam, 2005).

For members, organizational framing shifts and changes to organizational structures, relationships and policies as “progress,” “leadership” and “customer focus” can be coercive, as the constant introduction of change sets the stage for conflict between individuals and organizations. The situation can become especially stressful and frustrating when workers sense the organizational culture and/or specific changes violate the norms and values of their profession (Lammers & Garcia, 2009) and their beliefs about what it means to be a “professional” (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007). Significant and/or constant change as institutional practice creates second-order conflict (Smith & Eisenberg, 1987) between organizations and workers, triggering individuals to resist change based on the pre-existing personal (Chao, O’Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein & Gardner, 1994) and profession-based values (Morgan, 2005) and personal ethics (Detert, Trevino, & Sweitzer, 2008). Communication scholars have examined these conflicts in a variety of contexts, including how the “chainification” of restaurants—and the requisite industrial management standards they embed into these service-based occupations—is at odds with the professional standards of chefs, including autonomy and caring for food and people (Lynch, 2009). Other communication studies have examined how the HMO model of health care delivery and payment conflicts with physician’s professional standards (Barbour & Lammers, 2007) and how public relations practitioners in China integrate and balance Chinese cultural values with institutionalized public relations practices (Hou and Zhu, 2012).

The previous examples illustrate the clash that can occur between organizations using change to achieve profit-driven goals (Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott, 2008) and their members, who seeking to live their personal and professional values through their daily work, as accomplished through coworker relationships, organizational structures, and decision-making processes. The next section will discuss the various

conceptualizations for defining the process through which individuals become accepted—and accepting - members of organizations, followed by a discussion of how the changing structure of organizations—and work itself—is disrupting socialization processes and members’ sense of organizational identification, or their “perception of oneness with or belongingness to an organization (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p. 104).

ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIALIZATION PROCESSES

The process of how one becomes an accepted, integrated member of an organization is a robust area of research for both communication and management scholars. Across various literatures, the process has been labeled as either organizational *socialization* (Schein, 1968; VanMaanen & Schein, 1979) or organizational *assimilation* (Jablin, 1982, 1987). The term *organizational socialization* is rooted in management literature. Specifically, VanMaanen and Schein (1979) defined organizational socialization as “the process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role” (VanMaanen & Schein, 1979, p.211). As such, organizational socialization tactics are designed to help members “learn the ropes” (VanMaanen & Schein, 1979, p. 19) of the organization, a phrase which highlights VanMaanen and Schein’s focus on the ways organizations attempt to shape individuals to organizational needs, while failing to fully acknowledge the ways in which individuals exert influence over their socialization experiences.

Although sometimes using the terms socialization and assimilation simultaneously, communication scholars often frame their socialization research using Jablin’s (2001, 1987) stage model of organizational assimilation. Jablin first used the term *assimilation* to define the “ongoing behavioral and cognitive processes by which individuals join, become integrated into and exit organizations“ (Jablin & Krone, 1987, p.

712). Like Van Maanen and Schein, Jablin also identified two concurrent sets of communicative processes at work within his concept of *assimilation*. In the first set, an organization attempts to *socialize* an individual to its cultural expectations and behavioral norms (Jablin, 2001) through ongoing direct exchanges and implicit messages – the heart of organizational assimilation. The second set of processes, *individualization*—termed *personalization* by more recent scholars (Berkelaar, 2013; Kramer 2010) —are those communicative processes through which individuals exhibit influence on the organization as they attempt to “change their roles and work environments to better satisfy their values, attitudes, and needs” (Jablin, 1987, 2001). Jablin heightened focus on how individuals exhibit agency through communication (Kramer & Miller, 2013). However, Jablin’s updated conceptualization also contributed to some conceptual confusion, as in some of his work, he used assimilation to refer to the combined phases of encounter and metamorphosis (discussed in the next section), although at other times, he used *assimilation* to refer to the entire process of joining, engaging in and leaving an organization (Kramer & Miller, 2013).

To add to the complexity, more recent scholars have critiqued Jablin’s use of the term *assimilation* to describe the entire process of joining through leaving organizations because the term implicitly privileges organizational power over individual agency (Bullis, 1999; Pribble, 1990). As a result, scholars have returned to the term *socialization* to describe the overarching process of how “people enter into, participate in, and leave organizations” (Berkelaar, 2013) through ongoing communicative exchanges between organizations and members. As most often used in the scholarly literature, *assimilation* describes an organization’s efforts to shape the individual to its needs—and *personalization* describes the individual’s efforts to shape the organization to meet his or her needs. In their current forms, the concepts of *assimilation* and *personalization* are two

subprocesses of an overarching socialization process, each representing highly communicative processes that “involve interactions between competing and complementing tensions” (Berkelaar, 2013, p. 124) existing within and between organizations and individuals.

As noted previously, to align with these current definition the current study will use the term *socialization* to refer to the overall process of joining, participating in and leaving organizations, and use *assimilation* to refer to an organization’s efforts to mold members to its needs and goals (Kramer & Miller, 2013). However, it is important to note that the organizational power at the heart of recent critiques of the term *assimilation* can indeed greatly influence an individual’s exit-related sensemaking (Weick, 1995) from the earliest stages of the socialization process, beginning with anticipatory socialization (Jablin, 1987) all the way through exit. As such, by assuming employee voice is received positively by managers—and that voice generates positive outcomes for the individual and the organization—more recent conceptualizations may run the risk of *understating* the role of negative expressions of organizational power in response to employee voice, as well as the role this response can play in facilitating an employee’s exit-related sensemaking. Organizational power can be used to silence member voice (Rusbult et al., 1988) and to discipline members perceived to be a threat to existing organizational power structures, leaving members to perceive exit as their only remaining form of voice and influence.

Stages of Jablin’s (1987) Assimilation Model

Although using the term socialization to describe the overarching process, this study builds on Jablin’s (1987, 2001) model (which uses the term *assimilation* for the overarching process) by tracing exit-related sensemaking through each of the model’s

four phases and adding new insights to the experiences and processes contributing to organizational disengagement, and the final phase, exit. The first phase of Jablin's model (1987, 2001), *anticipatory socialization*, refers to the formal and informal ways people learn about potential vocations and specific organizations. *Vocational socialization* begins in childhood, occurring through indirect means via interactions with family, peers or friends, as well as through work experiences, education and media exposure (Jablin, 2001). Anticipatory organizational socialization is specific to an organization an individual will enter. Anticipatory organizational socialization occurs when individuals gather information about an organization through messages sponsored by the organization, such as job listings and company brochures, as well as through interaction with interviewers and current employees (Jablin, 2001). More recent communication research has added the role of ICTs and online resources as tools for individuals to use to learn about an organization prior to becoming a member (Berkelaar, 2013).

The second phase of Jablin's (1987, 2001) model, *encounter*, is when an individual engages in sensemaking related to role expectations and organizational norms. During this entry phase, individuals may experience "reality shock" when confronted by the difference between their expectations for the role and what the job actually entails (VanMaanen, 1978, p. 20). The encounter phase can be a stressful time for newcomers as they must let go of their initial expectations and adjust to the actual organizational culture (Miller, 2012). In this stage, newcomers may use extensive information-seeking strategies to clarify or re-align their understanding of organizational rules, norms and practices (Miller and Jablin, 1991).

In the third stage of Jablin's (1987) model, *metamorphosis*, members have gained familiarity with the organization and largely—but not necessarily completely—shifted from feeling like an outsider to an insider, considering themselves to be members of the

organization and no longer feeling like a newcomer. In this stage, individuals may also try to individualize their role to “better satisfy their needs ideas, and values” (Jablin, 1987, p. 693), a process Jablin termed *individualization* – often labeled *personalization* by more recent scholars (Berkelaar, 2013; Kramer, 2010).

It should be noted that in some of his work, Jablin referred to the processes of encounter and metamorphosis as *assimilation*, whereas other times he used the term *assimilation* to refer to the entire process of joining, working within, and leaving organizations—an inconsistency which contributed to conceptual confusion as seen in inconsistent interchanging use of the terms assimilation and socialization (Kramer & Miller, 2013). However, despite this issue, Jablin’s foregrounding of the role of individual agency in the assimilation process represented a significant contribution in the scholarly understanding of the processes through which individuals join, participate in and leave organizations. Jablin extended this contribution further through his later work on information-seeking strategies during organizational entry (Miller & Jablin, 1991), which further highlighted the role of individual agency in the assimilation process he defined.

The final phase of Jablin’s (2001) model is organizational disengagement/exit. Organizational exit is defined as a “process, not an event” (p. 785) where individuals begin withdrawal and engage in various types of pre-announcement and announcement communication with those inside and outside the organization. Jablin (2001) identifies three sub-phases of organizational exit, including 1) pre-announcement, 2) announcement and actual exit, and 3) postexit. Sensemaking (Weick, 1995) by the individual leaving as well as those to be left behind is common during this stage because the individual’s exit impacts not only the individual who leaves, but also those who remain, and ultimately the organization itself (Jablin, 2001).

More recent research has looked more closely at two broad categories of exit, involuntary exit and voluntary exit. Involuntary exit is exit not chosen by the individual, and may stem from organizational change resulting from a mergers and/or organizational restructuring (Kramer, 2010). Voluntary exit is planned by the individual, and is sometimes supported by planned organizational rituals, such as in the case of graduation (Davis & Myers, 2012) and retirement. Other types of voluntary exit are less planned and structured by the organization, such as when an individual chooses to make a career change (Kramer, 2010). In this instance, the exit may be planned by the individual for an extended period of time without the organization even being aware of the individual's intent to leave. Ebaugh's (1988) work on the process of unbecoming a member of an industry or role further highlighted the role of individual agency related to exit, as well as loss, involved in letting go of one's role as an organizational member. It also placed special focus on the fact that sensemaking related to exit can continue for an extended period of time after one actually leaves an organization.

Organizational Socialization as Mutual Influence

Organizations can use several different types of tactics to encourage members to assimilate to organizational needs and expectations, but the effectiveness of these tactics can be mitigated by the impact of organizational change and other factors. Myers and Oetzel (2003) noted that many types of events can influence the degree to which one feels assimilated, such as “unmet expectations, environmental shifts, changes in responsibility, promotions and burnout” (p. 439), as illustrated in several of the previously cited studies. Using interviews with individuals from multiple industries analyzed using the constant comparative method, Myers and Oetzel (2003) identified six key dimensions of organizational socialization, including: 1) familiarity with supervisors,

2) organizational acculturation, 3) recognition, 4) involvement, 5) job competency, and 6) adaptation and role negotiation (Myers & Oetzel, 2003).

Effective tactics support role orientation in part by reducing role ambiguity, defined as the “level of uncertainty surrounding the expectations about a single role” (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1990, p. 191) and role conflict, defined as the “incompatibility of demands facing the focal person” (p.191). Rizzo, House and Lirtzman (1970) explain that role conflict may occur between 1) an individual’s own standards and behaviors required of the job; 2) between time, resources and capabilities of an individual and required behavior; 3) between several conflicting roles the individual is expected to fulfill within the organization and 4) because of conflict between expectations an organizational demands. Lyons (1971) found that a lack of role clarity results in a decrease in job satisfaction, creating tension that may result in withdrawal from the organization.

More recently, socialization research has highlighted communicative efforts by new members to establish their organizational identity and navigate organizational relationships as new members—and throughout the socialization lifecycle. McPhee and Zaugg (1999) identified a complex membership negotiation process involving a: 1) dialectic of reputation and courtship during anticipatory organizational socialization; the 2) process of a new member beginning to identify and the organization and the organization offering inclusion to the individual; and finally, 3) individuals efforts claiming power and spokespersonship, a phase that directly acknowledges that even the highest level members of an organization must navigate the socialization process.

As Jablin’s (1987) concept of anticipatory socialization highlights, the process of claiming membership in an organization and/or occupation can begin before one joins the organization. Myers (2005) interviewed firefighters, finding that most had been socialized prior to entry through relationships with friends and family who worked in the

profession. Gibson and Papa (2000) termed this form of socialization organizational osmosis, defined as “the seemingly effortless adoption of the ideas, values, and culture of an organization on the basis of preexisting socialization experiences” (p. 79). This form of socialization, with dimensions of both organizational and occupational socialization, can be seen as a powerful form of values-related socialization. Achieving alignment to the values of an occupation or organization, such as “hard work” and “trust” among coworkers, as well as a match between the values of the organization and the individual, is important because if individuals perceive a mismatch between their personal values and goals and those of the organization, they are more likely to leave the organization (Chao et al., 1994).

Members seek information about an organization and a specific job role through a variety of online and interpersonal sources before joining an organization (Dailey, 2014) and once on the job (Myers, 1998). Waldeck, Siebold, and Flanagin (2004) examined individual’s choice of communication medium when seeking information about their organization (face-to-face, traditional media, or ICT), finding that face-to-face communication was the most important predictor of socialization effectiveness, and that individuals sometimes supplemented one channel with another in order to fulfill their information-seeking goal. Further highlighting the role of interpersonal relationships to helping members achieve a sense of membership and belonging, Bullis and Bach (1989) found that receiving recognition had a strong influence on increasing organizational identification, a feeling of similarity, belonging and membership (Cheney, 1983) that is important to relational development.

Limitations of Individual Influence During Socialization

While previous management and organizational communication literature has identified socialization as a process of mutual influence between an individual and an organization, more recent socialization theory and research has more fully considered the role and influence of individual agency. For example, Scott and Myers (2010) argue that although membership negotiations are reciprocal but asymmetrical (in favor of the organization), the capacity and influence of individual agency has been underestimated in the existing socialization literature, and the impact of organizational structure is overemphasized:

Social interaction is recursive and grounded in some level of partial knowledgeability. People monitor their behaviors and attempt to make behavioral choices on the basis of past actions...although people constitute the social system, they cannot fully control the context in which they do so. What's more, they inevitably draw on resources that they did not create alone. (p. 82)

Furthermore, as Scott and Myers (2010) point out, much of the existing socialization literature assumes that “newcomers” are new employees with little power. However, Dailey (2014) found that new college graduates who had previously interned at the company for which they had been hired full-time reported high levels of role clarity and confidence that helped them successfully fulfill their role requirements despite their “newcomer” status. Conversely, Kramer’s study of job transfers illustrated (1993, 1995, 1996) that experienced and tenured members must re-negotiate their membership following a role transition. These individuals “know” the organization and therefore do have some power, and in this way can exert agency while operating within the formal organizational power structures, even as their new role requires a renegotiation of their place within the organization. However, although individuals may be more able to *attempt* organizational influence than accounted for by earlier socialization research, previous research has not specifically explored how an organization’s *negative* responses

to employee voice may serve to silence members and facilitate exit-related sensemaking (Weick, 1995).

Newcomer status, whether as an organizational newcomer or role newcomer, triggers shifts in one's relationships across the organization. As a result, seemingly small occurrences such as a newcomer joining or a tenured employee receiving a promotion can influence members' satisfaction with their work environment and the quantity and quality of their relationship with coworkers, including peers and supervisors (i.e, the individuals to whom one directly reports and who supervises their daily work), as well as formal organizational leaders (ex. directors, vice presidents). As Sias' (2013) summarized, "The quality of the organization is virtually inextricable from the quality of the relationships among the organizational members" (p. 375). Organizational communication research is uniquely positioned to explore the ways in which coworker relationships are not simply entities existing within an organization but, through the creation, maintenance and navigation actually comprise the organization itself (Sias, 2013).

Coworker relationships are vital to effective socialization and organizational functioning. Morrison (2002) identified several connections between the type and breadth of networks and newcomers' socialization: newcomers with broader informational networks reported greater organizational knowledge; those with denser, stronger networks reported greater job mastery and role clarity; and those with larger networks reported greater overall social integration. Communication constructs found to be positively associated with members' workplace satisfaction include communication network participation and the communication culture of the organization (Eisenberg, Monge, & Miller, 1983; Jablin, 1982). Tenure is one factor that can impact the timing and topic of questions asked of one's network. New hires will use direct questions during

their early days on the job, switching to more indirect tactics after a period due to face-saving concerns (Miller & Jablin, 1991; Morrison, 1993; Teboul, 1994). As these findings illustrate, coworker relationships serve as a vital source of sensemaking for organizational members (Sias, 2013).

An Additional Layer—Role Socialization

As exit research by Ebaugh (1988), and a variety of socialization research illustrates, one is socialized not only to an organization, but also a role. The organizational socialization process is made more complex by the fact an organizational role is characterized by multiple dimensions, and that both the organization and current members convey expectations in various ways regarding how a new member should enact the role. VanMaanen and Schein (1979) identified three characteristics of organizational roles: 1) roles require a certain base of knowledge; 2) roles are rooted in a strategic base formed by the organization's goals and values; and 3) roles contain explicit and implicit expectations regarding an individual's purpose within the organization (VanMaanen & Schein, 1979).

Furthermore, three different role-based requirements, each of which represents a boundary passage from outsider to insider, were defined: 1) functional, or task-related requirements, 2) hierarchical requirements, representing organizational definitions of the individual's merit, potential, past performance and tenure, and 3) inclusionary, others' formal and informal evaluations of an individual's readiness for a role (VanMaanen & Schein, 1979). Each of these boundaries is negotiated through a newcomer's interaction with the organization and its members. Although often studied in terms of how new members become integrated into an organization (Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Ashforth,

Sluss, & Saks, 2007), organizational socialization also continues throughout a member's tenure due to factors like mergers and job transitions (Kramer, 2004).

A variety of individual and organizational socialization tactics offer support and exert pressure upon individuals to learn and adapt to role-related expectations when they join a new organization. VanMaanen (1978) defined a six-dimensional taxonomy of organizational socialization tactics, noting that beyond formal tactics offered by the organization, there is a "second wave" of socialization (p. 22) that occurs when an individual must begin performing a new role—this can be a time of discomfort and anxiety for the individual, particularly if the actual role does not match their expectations based on the socialization tactics they received. Feldman's (1976) model of organizational socialization conceptualized the process in a way that indicates socialization extends beyond the newcomer phase and continues throughout a member's tenure with the organization, through three stages of organizational socialization: 1) anticipatory, 2) accommodation, and 3) role management.

Role of Professional Identity

In addition to working towards achieving accepted member status, individuals also wish to enact their professional identity (marketing specialist, teacher, chef, auditor, chemical technician, etc.) within the context of their designated organizational role. To do this, members must first learn what is expected—and accepted—for their professional role within their current organization (i.e, employer).

This sensemaking (Weick, 1995) can represent a significant amount of mental, emotional and communicative work for organizational members, as it is largely through communication with others that individuals develop their individual identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), as well as a sense of identification with the organizations to which they

belong (Cheney, 1983; Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998). More recent organizational communication research by Kuhn and Nelson (2002) more fully reflects the communicative work involved in establishing and maintaining one's sense of organizational identification (Cheney, 1983), conceptualizing it not as a static state of created by and resting within a member, but rather as an ongoing process continuously (re-)defined through "communicative acts illustrative of one's attachment to one or more identity structures" (p. 7). These multiplex goals of achieving accepted member status, as well defining and maintaining one's sense of personal identity, organizational identification, and professional identity represent a significant source of communicative work and sensemaking for members.

During this communicative work, discrepancies may develop between what the individual feels should be done to appropriately fulfill the responsibilities of their profession within the organization, and the degree to which the organization and its other members signal an appreciation for a member's professional value to the organization (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). In their review on the existing literature on professions Lammers and Garcia (2009) articulated ten characteristics of a profession: 1) emotional neutrality, 2) a body of knowledge, 3) formal standards of conduct, 4) service orientation, 5) social status, 6) training and education, 7) self-control, 8) social control, 9) formal associations, and 10) professional identity. These professional identity factors may or may not be supported and validated by organizational communication and resource allocation, potentially generating opportunities for varying levels of identification with the organization, and/or workgroup (Lammers, Atouba & Carlson, 2013). An organization's reputation within a community or industry may generate additional communicative work for members during conversations with family, friends and acquaintances (Frandsen, 2012).

Critiques of Organizational Socialization Research

Overall, socialization research has been criticized for privileging the position of the organization and management. Additionally, traditional stage models of socialization imply an explicitly linear, forward and largely predictable path, with limited exploration of backward movement (for an exception to the latter, see Kramer, Dougherty, & Pierce, 2004). This framing of exit also fails to account for various ways communication dynamics and workplace relationships can influence exit. Jablin and Miller's (1991) research on information-seeking tactics, and the body of communication research it triggered, further emphasize the influence of individual agency in navigating and learning about organizations.

An additional critique of socialization research is that it is biased to focus on longer-term organizational memberships or occupational/career affiliations (Berkelaar, 2013; Jablin, 1987). More recent socialization research has explored some of the socialization dynamics in different situations and settings, including internal job transfers (Kramer, 1993), promotions (Kramer & Noland, 1999), within a volunteer-based community theatre group (Kramer, 2009), and in organizations that offer support processes related to planned exits (Davis & Myers, 2012). Kramer and Miller (2013) call for more diverse samples related to studying socialization and exit, and highlight the opportunity conducting further research into the organizational exit process.

Finally, the focus on the positive support organizations and their members offer in an attempt to help members achieve the socialization goals desired by the organization has failed to fully account for the dark side of organizational socialization processes. These "dark side" socialization factors can include abusive leadership, absent or incompetent management, and problematic coworkers, as well as the destabilizing impact of organizational change on existing socialization processes and programs. Additionally,

previous socialization research has presented a view of socialization as a largely positive, steady, forward-moving process through discrete stages. One exception is Kramer's (1993) examination of job transfers and promotions, which highlighted the simultaneous letting go of one's previous role and attaching to a new role, but even this insight does not account for the ways in which the broader organizational context and the individual's assessment of their relationship with the organization may result in loops of sensemaking, identification and shifts in one's sense of belonging to—and understanding—the organization. As discussed previously, these socialization disrupters are especially problematic given the frequency and intensity of change in organizations today.

The current project will provide new depth to organizational communication scholarship related to these additional socialization dynamics. Specifically, this study will explore how members' experiences with organizational change, coworker relationships, and other potential organizational factors that can destabilize one's sense of being an accepted—and accepting—organizational member, potentially triggering exit-related sensemaking, decisions and actions. To more clearly understand the ways in which change may disrupt both members' sense of belonging and the organizational processes designed to support member socialization, the next section will explore different types of change as defined in existing organizational communication and management literature. It will also explore the various ways institutionalized nature of change is disrupting member socialization processes for both new and tenured members.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE AS SOCIALIZATION DISRUPTION

“Change is the new normal” is more than a cultural idiom—it is reality in an increasing number of organizations today. Change is necessary to adapt to an increasingly complex, profit-driven and competitive marketplace. Current

conceptualizations of change communication and implementation, although helpful for understanding the general dynamics of change, often fall short of capturing the depth and complexity of change in organizations today. Even the term “change management” popular in both scholarly literature and the popular press, positions change as something that can be controlled—and is controlled—by an organization. This raises important questions about the role of members in organizational change: is it a process done to them or with them? Is change an event or a process? What role do employees, managers and leaders each have in implementing and maintaining the change? How do employees make sense of change and its meaning as it relates to their personal roles in, and value to, an organization?

Traditional stage models of socialization do not fully account for the ways in which organizational change may impact a member’s sense of identification or commitment to an organization. Changes, whether in the form of a sudden jolt (Meyer, 1982), sustained change process such as a corporate merger (Kramer, 2004), or individual transfer or promotion (Kramer, 1995; Kramer & Noland 1999), can lead members to question the values, priorities or sense of order within the organization. Change can also trigger organizational members to engage in a variety of information-seeking tactics.

To gain a full understanding of how change and change management efforts are communicatively structured by organizational members, Lewis (2006) asserts that communication scholarship should shift focus from examination of the often unidirectional dissemination of change messages from change implementers and managers to employees, to an exploration of the expectations regarding change as a “dialogic process wherein various stakeholders engage one another in clarification, negotiation of meaning, and perspective taking” (p. 40). Such a lens would both problematize and deepen our understanding of concepts such as “change communication”

and” change management.” For example, Lewis, Richardson and Hamel (2003) explored how roles and power influence whose voice is heard most during change planning, implementation and communication. Additionally, Lewis’ (2007) stakeholder theory of change communication reflects a more complex, multidirectional change communication process, while also accounting for how role-based power shapes change communication processes. Prior to Lewis’ most recent work, previous scholarship focused on two different categories of change, punctuated equilibrium versus episodic change, and planned versus unplanned change.

Punctuated Equilibrium vs. Episodic Change

These two perspectives focus on two different conceptions of the temporal dimension of change. The punctuated equilibrium views organizations as experiencing extended periods of stability interrupted by episodic bursts of significant change (Gersick, 1991) that are “discontinuous, infrequent, and intentional” (Weick & Quinn, 1999, p. 365). The continuous change model, on the other hand, views change as emergent and ongoing. Brown and Eisenhardt (1997) assert that the continuous change model is more realistic given the ongoing change faced by many organizations today. Additionally, Zorn, Page and Cheney (2000) assert that organizations are increasingly organizing themselves for continual change in order to adapt to the dynamic environments in which they operate.

Planned vs. Unplanned Change

Planned change is common in organizations. Lewis (2011) defines planned change as those “brought about through the purposeful efforts of organizational stakeholder who are accountable for the organization’s operation” (p. 37; see also Ford & Ford, 1995; Jian, 2007; Porras & Silvers, 1991). Examples of planned change include

implementing a new technology, policy change, downsizing, or mergers. Connor and Lake (1994) outlined a model of managing planned change that illustrates the complexities involved in large scale planned change. They highlight that planned change is achieved through a variety of methods, including technical, structural, managerial, and people (Connor & Lake, 1994). Additionally, these changes require change to individual task behaviors, organizational processes, strategic direction and organizational culture. This multi-layered view of change highlights the potential for a variety of communication-related issues during change (Connor & Lake, 1994), involving the need to not only managing tasks, but also managing the individual stakeholders who may influence the success of the change and/or be directly affected by its implementation (Lewis, 2007).

Unplanned change, in contrast, is “brought into the organization due to environmental or uncontrollable sources” and is typically generated by an organizational crisis, “an event that is an unpredictable, major threat that can have a negative effect on the organization, industry or stakeholders if handled improperly” (Coombs, 1999, p. 2). The BP oil spill and Hurricane Katrina are two examples of crises as unplanned change. Whether planned or unplanned, change is not always a short-term discrete event. Lewis (2011) notes that organizations sometimes change, or evolve, gradually (unplanned change) and that organizational leaders may implement programs to support these changes over time as needed (planned change).

Although planned and unplanned changes differ in their causes, both can disrupt the organizational environment in ways that are unexpected by members. Additionally, communication during planned change is made more difficult by the fact that although there may be a single change event, such as the implementation of a new email system, the process of change occurs over time, requiring members seek to adapt to and make

sense of the change, and a variety of formal and informal messages related to the change. It is worth noting that the term “planned change” itself can be misleading, as although the change is planned by the organization, it may not feel “planned” by the organizational members, as they may not be receiving all of the intended information, may choose not to process certain messages, or may simply be too overwhelmed with their regular work to engage in sensemaking about individual messages or the change itself.

Communicating in Support of Change

The length of the process can become an even bigger factor in determining the success of larger scale changes that must be communicatively managed over time, such as a merger or acquisition. Kramer (2004) found that following a merger, airline pilots felt more secure in their jobs over time, but developed less favorable attitudes toward the acquisition event. Qualitative data indicated this decline in attitude about the acquisition was caused by frustration related to how the pilots’ seniority was credited following the merger. This example illustrates the complexity involved in communicating about multiple types of changes over time, as well as the multiple factors that can influence members’ change-related sensemaking processes. Furthermore, large-scale changes often result in other changes (Lewis & Siebold, 1998; Schweiger, Csiszar, & Napier, 1993), stimulating ongoing sensemaking that can either support or contradict the organization’s formal change communications, and may result in different assessments of various change outcomes (for example, feeling good about the change outcome achieved by the company, but negatively about how the change impacted them personally).

Additionally, the tensions that can exist between organizational members at different levels in the hierarchy during change are sometimes overlooked given the frequent focus on studying the formal, planned messages an organization offers in

support of change. However, it is these tensions that can cause planned change to be interpreted in ways other than intended. In an examination of long-term change at a power plant, Fairhurst, Cooren and Cahill (2002) found that employees' perceptions about management's allocation of resources and a perceived shift in vision for the organization represented a use of organizational power that employees resented, resulting in significant threats to the success of a planned organizational restructuring. As further evidence of the disconnect that can exist between employees and leaders, McKinley and Scherer (2000) found that although employees experienced disorder as a result of change, executives found change reassuring and chose to implement more change to achieve their goals. This disconnect regarding perceptions of, and reactions to, change can result in what Jian (2007) calls unintended consequences, or the "consequences that escape the intention of change planners" (p. 6).

Despite the complexities of larger-scale, longer-term, multi-event change, many studies of change focus on the implementation of a single change, what Laster (2008) calls uni-change. In her dissertation research examining the communication of multiple changes within an organization, Laster (2008) conceptualizes two additional types of change, multiple change, defined as "more than one independent change occurring simultaneously," and multi-dimensional change, defined as "one change having subsequent parts" (p. 6). Along with these differences, individuals may also perceive and evaluate formal, planned change messages differently. Laster's (2008) findings indicated that of the four message strategies used to communicate change, messages that provided information about the magnitude of the change produced least degree of perceived deception, the greatest degree of coping efficacy and higher degrees of organizational competency appraisals (Laster, 2008). These findings indicate that although just as complex, long-term change can complicate change outcomes for individuals and

organizations, communications that tackle this complexity can help maintain trust with members.

This focus on further exploring the multidimensional aspects of change and change communication represents a valuable addition to organizational communication research. Individual differences in perceptions and reactions to change messages also point to the possibility that change process and outcomes cannot be fully controlled by the organization. Individuals can and do exert agency in their sensemaking activities related to not only formal, planned change messages but also in relation to perceived, actual and projected changes to their material working conditions.

Shifts Caused by Change

Just as change can disrupt organizational structures, processes, and relationships, it can also disrupt an individual's sense of connection to an organization. Although sensemaking and surprise (Louis, 1980) have been largely studied in the context of newcomer socialization, less attention has been given to how change disrupts socialization, or the consequences of socialization efforts that fail to prepare newcomers for the shifting dynamics of organizational life today, and the impact of specific change events on a particular organization. As the next section will illustrate, individuals are adept at sensing and adapting to change, and often take great effort to re-orient themselves when confronted with uncertainty within organizations. Sensemaking (Weick, 1995) and surprise (Louis, 1980) are two concepts that contribute to our understanding of how individuals attempt to re-orient themselves following change.

Sensemaking

Sensemaking provides a helpful lens for understanding the role of individual agency in creating meaning around organizational events, and the actions individuals

choose to take based on that meaning. Weick (1995) defines sensemaking as a process of invention undertaken by an individual, a process that “highlights the action, activity, and creating that lays down the traces that are interpreted and then reinterpreted” (p. 13) by the individual. Sensemaking is comprised of seven properties: 1) it is grounded in identity construction, 2) enactive of sensible environments, 3) social, 4) ongoing, 5) focused on and by 6) extracted cues, and 7) driven by plausibility rather than accuracy (Weick, 1995).

Individuals engage in sensemaking to reduce the equivocality generated by—and make sense of—a variety of organizational events and everyday happenings. Previous research has focused on individual’s sensemaking processes related to unexpected events (Christianson, Farkas, Sutcliffe & Weick, 2009) and strategic change (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Sonenshein, 2009; Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007). Sensemaking is also used to generate understanding of the daily functioning of the organization (Cornelissen, 2005; Cornelissen, Oswick, Christensen, & Phillips, 2008; Rerup & Feldman, 2011), one’s professional role within an organization (Cornelissen, 2005) and the organizational culture (Drazin, Glynn, & Kazanjian, 1999; Hill & Levenhagen, 1995). Recent sensemaking research has begun examining the role of emotions in sensemaking understanding emotions, such as those generated by making mistakes (Catino & Patriotta, 2013) and organizational crisis (Cornelissen, Matere, & Vaara, 2014).

Newer sensemaking concepts like sensebreaking and sensegiving account for the role other individuals and organizations play in one’s sensemaking processes, as well as highlight how organizations not only change themselves but can be strategic in changing how members see themselves. As Pratt (2000) conceptualized in his study of organizational identification among Amway distributors, sensebreaking involves

“disrupt[ing] an individual’s sense of self to create a meaning void that must be filled” (p. 464). Amway engaged in sensebreaking with its distributors through motivational messages that encouraged them to link their personal identities to their material possessions, while positioning success in their Amway roles as the means to that end. Another form of identity void created through Amway’s sensebreaking involved creating a desire to be free of the personal constraints on one’s time and effort associated with a traditional 9-5 job.

Sensegiving is another process by which others can influence an individual’s overall sensemaking process. Sensegiving involves “attempting to influence the sensemaking process...toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality” (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442). Pratt (2000) found that Amway engaged in sensegiving through positive programming, which involved setting up new and junior members with successful senior members, a practice he coined positive programming. Sensebreaking and sensegiving account for the role of other individuals and organizations in one’s sensemaking, highlighting the ways in which organizations strategically use their communication resources, including members themselves, to create and maintain strong cultures (Deal & Kennedy, 1992; O’Reilly, 1989).

Although naming these concepts helps increase awareness of the complexities embedded within sensemaking, Sandberg and Tsoukas (2015) argue that sense is not an object that one person can give to another, rather it is a “skillful activity to be engaged in” (p. 24) with actors that make and give sense to each other simultaneously. Another particularly contested aspect of the sensemaking process is the idea of prospective sensemaking. Weick (1969) argues against the idea of prospective sensemaking, asserting that even sensemaking about the future was based on reflections on past events. More recent sensemaking scholars have challenged that assumption, however, asserting that

reflective, past-focused sensemaking does not account for the role of anticipating others' reactions and related outcomes in one's sensemaking efforts (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015).

Given the rich nature of the concept and debates around its dimensions, sensemaking is a robust resource for communication scholars seeking to understand the meanings individuals create and assign to various organizational happenings, both big and small (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015), especially the high levels of environmental ambiguity and lack of control individuals can experience in the context of organization change. Sensemaking has its "genesis in disruptive ambiguity" (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 413) and is a "continued redrafting of an emerging story, so that it becomes more comprehensive, incorporates more of the observed data, and is more resilient in the face of criticism" (p. 415). As such, sensemaking provides a helpful lens for understanding individual agency before, during and after organizational exit.

The surprise factor of change must also be considered as a disruption of organizational socialization and identification that can contribute to an exit decision. Louis (1980) outlined a model of newcomer experience centered on the role of surprises in shaping an individual's socialization experience. In total, three features of the newcomer experience were highlighted: change, contrast and surprise (Louis, 1980). Change was defined as the "objective difference between the old and new settings," noting the assumption that the "newness of the 'changed to' situation requires adjustment by the individual" (Louis, 1980, p. 235).

Louis (1980) detailed five forms of surprise, which although discussed as part of the newcomer experience, may certainly be applicable to more tenured employees experiencing large-scale and/or ongoing periods of organizational change. The five forms of surprise occur when: 1) conscious expectations about the job are not fulfilled in

the newcomer's early job experience, 2) expectations about one's skills, values or needs are unmet, 3) unconscious job expectations are unmet or unanticipated, 4) an individual inaccurately forecasts their reaction to a new experience, and 5) an individual makes assumptions about the organization's culture (based on experience in previous settings) that are proven not to apply in the new setting (Louis, 1980).

These forms of surprise highlight that sensemaking is a recurring process that occurs over time as people seek to assign meaning both to the surprise and the organizational context in which the surprise occurred. Through sensemaking, an individual makes meaning of the surprise and then chooses an appropriate behavioral response to the situation they face (Louis, 1980). This decision, and potentially behavior, in turn may generate more surprises and sensemaking. As Maitlis (2005) explains:

Sensemaking allows people to deal with uncertainty and ambiguity by creating rational accounts of the world that enable action. Sensemaking thus precedes decision making and follows it: sensemaking provides the 'clear questions and clear answers' (Weick, 1993, p. 636) that feed decision-making, and decision making often stimulates the surprises and confusion that create occasions for sensemaking. (p. 21).

Given the amount and complexity of change and surprises that can be generated by mergers, acquisitions and other forms of organizational restructuring, these types of surprises and related sensemaking can also apply to tenured employees during times of change, as they must orient themselves to a "new" organization. Although the practice of resocialization following change (Hart, Miller, & Johnson, 2003) has received less scholarly attention than newcomer socialization, it merits attention given the role it can play in mitigating the effects of surprise during times of structural change. Hart et al. (2003) found that the effectiveness of various socialization tactics does indeed change over time, with collective tactics positively influencing organizational commitment upon hire, while four months after hire, organizational commitment was predicted by formal

tactics and coworker support. The next section will more fully explore the role of communication from and with a particular set of coworkers—organizational leaders—on one’s sense of membership throughout one’s organizational tenure.

Leadership Relationships

Like coworker communication more generally, leadership communication has been studied from many different perspectives (Fairhurst, 2014; Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2013). Much leadership research has explored the quantity, quality and effectiveness of leadership messaging in a variety of individual, team (Morgeson, DeRue, & Karam, 2010), and virtual contexts (Neufeld, Wan & Fang, 2010). Positive outcomes of effective leadership communication includes trust in leadership and increased upward communication (Burke, Sims, Lazzara, & Salas, 2007). Graen and Uhl-Bien’s (1995) work on Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) research draws special attention to how communication flow and supervisor-subordinate relationships may differ because supervisors may treat individual subordinates differently. Subordinate treatment may vary in terms of how much of their time leaders grant to a particular subordinate, where the leader chooses to allocate organizational resources, and the organizational insights leaders share with various subordinates based on the quality of the relationship they have with each individual. Even the language of Graen and Uhl-Bien’s (1995) conceptualization reflects these qualitative relationship differences, defining high quality supervisor-subordinate relationships as leadership exchange, while lower quality relationships with less exchange and a focus on the supervisory aspect of the relationship is called supervisory exchange.

Graen’s (2012) more recent research acknowledges that leadership is a communicative practice exercised by many organizational members, regardless of their

place in the organizational hierarchy—for example, accounting for how team members build and leverage various interpersonal relationships within teams. Fairhurst and Chandler (1989) and others expanded on the original LMX research through a discursive turn focused on exploring how leader-member relationships are defined by communicative interaction. Specifically, leaders in low quality leader-member relationships focus on communicative acts that signal their higher status and authority, while leaders in high quality leader-member relationships communicate to minimize power distance by sharing information and providing members opportunities to participate in nonroutine problem solving (Fairhurst & Chandler, 1989; Sergeant & Frankel, 1998; Stage, 1999).

More recent scholarship has further explored leadership as a communicative process. Lewis' (2011) research on change communication, which positions change implementers as leaders given their role in designing and defining the meaning of change events for organizational members. Research focused on exploring how leaders communicate organizational ethics through their communication choices is also based on viewing leadership as a communicative process (Ladkin, 2008; Tourish & Vatcha, 2005). Although leaders certainly have the power to manage meaning of everything from short-term change events (Hearn & Ninan, 2003) to more gradual, cultural evolution (Bayle-Cordier, Mirvis & Moingeon, 2014; Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Van De Ven, 2013), followers also assign meaning to a leaders presence or absence, as well as the tone and tenor of their direct experiences and observations with leaders. Research has found that specific manager and leader behaviors that signal openness and willingness to take positive action in response to upward employee feedback provide a sense of psychological safety that increases the likelihood of employee voice (Detert & Burris,

2007; Edmondson, 2003), In addition, supportive leadership behaviors have the strongest impact on the willingness of top employees to express voice (Detert & Burris, 2007).

Conversely, leaders who punish expression of employee voice enforce silence and otherwise damage organizational culture and functioning, highlighting the dark side of leadership. Caldwell & Canuto-Carranco (2010) coined the term organizational terrorism to account for the most extreme forms of problematic leadership communication, highlighting how organizational terrorist leaders use: 1) a focus on their own goals, 2) treatment of others, 3) accountability to self, 4) use of threats and fear, 5) a sense of entitlement, 6) a self-centered moral perspective, and 7) justification of the consequences of their actions, to privilege their own desires and inflict abuse on followers. The authors' choice of the terrorism metaphor is a strategic, and they draw parallels between the threat terrorists' beliefs and actions pose to global societies, and the threats leaders acting as organizational terrorists pose to organizations. As a result, organizational terrorism is defined as "the actions of any organization members which are taken to further a self-serving personal agenda that undermines the long-term welfare and growth of the organization and denies the rights of organization members" (Caldwell & Canuto-Carranco, 2010, p. 160).

More generally, workplace bullying is a problematic form of coworker communication across all organizational levels, in the form of verbal abuse, offensive verbal and nonverbal threatening behaviors, humiliation, intimidation, and work interference or sabotage (Lutgen-Sandvik, Namie, & Namie, 2009). Perhaps most problematically as it relates to abusive leadership, Lutgen-Sandvik and Tracy (2012) explain that, particularly in U.S. culture, "hierarchical position is often equated with voice in a way the designated highly placed bullies as truth tellers and targeted workers a troublemakers or problems" (p. 8; see also Lutgen-Sandvik, 2003). Furthermore,

discourses about workplace bullying privilege organizations and their leaders, while minimizing and silencing both victims of abuse and a broader conversations about the prevalence and impact of employee abuse (Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy, 2012). As Jablin (1987) stated, “While the nature of an employee’s communication relationships with coworkers may not directly impact his or her turnover propensity, these relationships likely impact his or her affective responses to the work environment, which in turn are associated with the intent to leave” (p. 721). This can be especially problematic for cross cultural supervisory relationships. Additional research has confirmed the role of team member relationships in contributing to exit intentions (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006; Major, Kozlowski, Chao, & Gardner, 1995; Scott et.al., 1999). In a comprehensive review of existing employee turnover literature, Kramer (2011) identified “intent to leave” as the most accurate predictor of actual exit.

As the previous examples illustrate, everyday leadership—both positive and negative—can be very meaning laden for members (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011), including simple observations of leadership behaviors and treatment of others. As will be highlighted in the next section, the meaning assigned to these discrete events can be a significant contributor to exit depending on the valence of the observed behaviors and messages. Upon repeated experiences with less than supportive leadership and manager communication, members may come to see exit as an expression of voice and an opportunity to “acquire influence and experience personal growth, insight...and achievement” (Scott & Myers, 2010, p. 89) not provided to them in their current organization. The next section will review existing literature and current conceptualizations of the exit process.

ORGANIZATIONAL EXIT

Given the current state of tumult in many organizations, it is somewhat surprising that exit remains the least studied dimension of the socialization process (Berkelaar, 2013; Jablin, 2001). Additionally, although the term organizational exit implies that exit is a discrete event (Jablin, 2001) rather than a process, scholars often study the exit process at the message level by examining individuals' choices related to communicating their exit to others (Klatzke, 2008; Lewis, 1999, 2006).

Organizational exit provides a helpful framework for exploring the often hidden organizational power dynamics can thwart individual attempts to adapt to and individualize their working environments, navigate workplace relationships, and fulfill their professional obligations within a particular organizational context. Giddens (1984) describes organizations as “power containers,” (p. 179) with power dynamics embedded in the system of rules, resources and relationships that structure an organization. Structuration theory has been criticized for overemphasizing action and not accounting adequately for the limitations generated by organizational power dynamics and enacted through organizational structures (Poole & McPhee, 2005). It is when these attempts to express voice engage individualization are unsuccessful or unvalued that a member may choose the one remaining act of voice and agency they perceive as available to them—a decision to exit the organization.

Exit as Decision Process

As previous sections illustrate, work in organizations today expands far beyond simply beyond fulfilling one's role-based requirements. Particularly during times of change individuals must adapt to a constant stream of new leaders, managers, policies, processes and/or technological systems (Scott & Myers, 2010) in addition to completing their professional work. Change represents a constant micro and macro-level

restructuring of the organization, generating continual sensemaking by employees trying to assess their place within, and value to, the organization on which their livelihood depends. In addition to dealing with the material outcomes of workplace changes, this constant sensemaking can be cognitively (Michel, 2007), emotionally (Huy, 2002; Voronov & Vince, 2012) and physically stressful (Dahl, 2011; Michel, 2011) for employees. Kramer and Hess (2002) outlined rules for the display of emotion in the workplace and Fugate, Kinicki and Prussia (2008) found that negative emotions predict sick time and intentions to quit. As noted earlier, a review of employee turnover literature on employee turnover identified “intent to leave” (i.e., quit) as the best predictor of actual exit (Kassing 2012; Kramer, 2010).

The complexity of multiple, overlapping exit-related factors occurring over time is perhaps best reflected in Lee, Mitchell and Wise’s (1994, 1999) unfolding model of voluntary turnover. The model details five decision-making paths that lead to organizational exit. The path an individual selects is influenced by the interaction between five key elements: shocks, scripts, image violations, dissatisfaction and alternative job opportunities. A shock is an “event that generates information or has meaning about a person’s job” (Lee et al., 1994, p. 60), while a script is a pre-existing plan of action based on “prior decisions, rules, learned responses and circumstances surrounding prior shocks” (p. 61). Scripts account for the role of previous experience both with an individual’s current employer, as well as previous employers.

As outlined by Lee et al. (1994, 1999) Path 1 is caused by a shock and reliance on a pre-existing plan, such as plans to retire. Path 2 involves a shock and decision to quit without looking for an alternative because of an image violation (i.e., violation of personal values or violation of expected career path); leaving may be immediate. In path 3, a shock stems from image violations that result in evaluation of current job and a

search for a new job. Path 4 results from lower job satisfaction rather than a shock. In their extension of the unfolding model, Lee et al. (1999) divided path 4 into 4a and 4b, with 4a representing a gradual exit decision (not caused by shock but rather by observations and experiences over time) that ultimately results in job exit without job search, although 4b is also a gradual decision, but does include a job search and evaluation of alternatives before leaving.

During times of uncertainty, employees pay special attention to their environment, seeking information, engaging in sense making as to how the change will impact them, and perhaps most importantly, trying to figure out what they need to do to keep their jobs. Although a specific shock, or series of shocks, may trigger an initial reassessment, it does not necessarily result in an instantaneous decision to leave. Rather, it triggers a larger sense-making process related to one's personal identity as an organizational member and the degree to which one feels valued by the organization, ultimately influencing one's decision to stay. Management scholars have explored the reasons why people stay in jobs, rather than leave, focusing on factors of individual motivations and job embeddedness. Most recently, Hom, Mitchell, Lee, & Griffeth (2012) challenge the previous organizational communication (Kramer, 2010) and management research by defining intent to leave not as the criterion for determining impending exit, but rather as a state that mediates how other exit antecedents influence exit (Hom et al., 2009; Hom, Mitchell, Lee & Griffeth, 2012).

Additionally, Hom et al. (2012) question the assumption that individuals have full discretion in their choice to leave, arguing that this belief fails to account for factors such as a lack of attractive job alternatives or family and financial constraints that may prevent exit by an employee who would prefer to leave. As a result, Hom et al. (2012) defined two types of stayers and two types of leavers, as determined by individual motivations, as

well as job embeddedness: enthusiastic stayers, enthusiastic leavers, reluctant stayers, and reluctant leavers. These latest concepts articulate differences in stayers and leavers, while broadening our understanding of exit as a process occurring over time, and more fully accounting for the role of individual's beliefs about their job and the external pressures they may face (i.e., encouragement to stay or leave from friends or family – or other job offers) play in exit decisions and the timing of an actual exit event. Although offering valuable insights into organizational exit, these studies focus on individuals' states of mind and motivation levels as antecedents of exit, without exploring the organizational communication and culture factors that contribute to employee enthusiasm or reluctance to exit. Despite this limitation, this most recent research represents a valuable elaboration on the exit as process perspective first defined by Hirschman's (1970) Exit-Voice-Loyalty model.

Exit, Voice, Loyalty, & Neglect

Hirschman's model of Exit-Voice-Loyalty (1970) explores exit decisions from a cognitive, decision-making perspective. The original EVL model was envisioned applying to a wide variety of exit, including organizations exiting an industry, individuals choosing to leave their country of residence, as well as individuals choosing to forsake their membership in an organization. In his original model, Hirschman (1970) outlined three potential responses to one's dissatisfaction with an organization. The first option is to exit, forgoing one's membership and leaving the organization. The second option is to express voice, defined as "any attempt at all to change rather than escape from an objectionable state of affairs" (Hirschman, 1970, p. 30). The third option, loyalty, means one is willing to "suffer in silence, confident that things will soon get better" (Hirschman, 1970, p. 38). Rusbult et al. (1988) added the concept of the neglect to the EVL(N) model

to account for individuals who choose to remain with the organization although “passively allowing conditions to deteriorate through reduced interest or effort, chronic lateness or absences, using company time for personal business, or increased error rate” (p. 601).

Like Jablin’s (1987) original stage-based model, the EVLN model presents four discrete stages. Additionally, EVLN positions neglect and exit as an individual’s negative response to workplace dissatisfaction and frames voice and loyalty as positive responses. However, more recent research challenged each of these assumptions. In a brief review of previous EVLN research, Burris, Detert, and Chiaburu (2008) highlight that specific to organizational exit, an employee does not simply either speak up or leave, she may also choose to remain silent and leave, or speak up and stay. Similarly, Hirschman’s (1970) framing of silence as loyalty fails to recognize that a member may choose to express voice or exit out of loyalty as well (Burris, Detert, & Chiaburu, 2008), not just stay silent. Specifically, voice or loyalty may be motivated by a member’s beliefs about the way the organization should function, treat its employees and/or should serve its customers. Notably, these member communication choices, and the organizational dynamics around them, are represented in the organizational communication discipline through Kassing’s (2011) research agenda on dissent, which explores the various ways members “express disagreement or contradictory opinions about organizational practices, policies and operations” (Kassing, 1998, p. 183).

Finally, Rusbult et al. (1988) frame neglect behaviors positions as an individual trait or choice, obscuring the role of the organization’s previous response(s) to the member’s voice in influencing members’ decision to engage in neglect. Furthermore, this conceptualization fails to address the fact that organizations often view—and respond to—expression of employee voice negatively, which can build resentment among

employees, potentially triggering either neglect or exit-related sensemaking. Recent work by Bashur and Oc (2014) —through their updated Voice, Exit, Neglect, Punishment, Improvement (VENPIL) model—extends the EVLN model even farther by more fully accounting for the overlapping, time-based, organizationally-driven, multi-outcome dynamics embedded in the original EVLN model.

Research Questions

Gaining a deeper understanding of individual sensemaking related to macro-level organizational communication dynamics will extend current understanding of how organizational communication influences exit. Uncertainty is common and constant in many organizations today—and work is a core part of our identity, setting the stage for first sensemaking, and then thoughts of exit if organizational communication is insufficient, abusive or otherwise problematic. Yet, exit is not openly discussed in organizations either by the organization or its members, in part because of cultural pressure to be positive, not negative (Gordon, 2011; Pastorek, 2012). Particularly in corporate life, individuals are often spoken for—and are explicitly or implicitly silenced by the organization. This study of exit from an organizational communication perspective sheds new light on the relationship between organizational structural shifts, organizational change (macro and micro), and individual sensemaking prior to an exit decision. These findings offer fresh insights into the exit process, as well as the relational and organizational dynamics that thwart individual voice, complicate socialization and, often, lead to exit-related sensemaking and a decision to leave the organization.

The following research questions will guide this study:

RQ 1: What organizational actions or events contribute to sensemaking related to organizational exit?

RQ 2: What are the organizational communication dynamics that contribute to an individual's decision to exit?

RQ 3: What structural factors support or impede an employee's sense of communicative agency?

RQ 4: How do employees' narratives about their organizational exit experiences reflect their sense of agency (or perceived lack thereof) on the job?

In this chapter, I have detailed the theoretical framework used for this study, organizational socialization, sensemaking and organizational culture as manifested through workplace relationships and change. In the next chapter, I will review the methodology used for this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

As the least studied stage of the organizational assimilation process, the use of a qualitative method is especially helpful for fleshing out the dimensions of the concept, while also giving voice to participants' experiences. The end result is a theory of exit-related sense making grounded in lived experience, rather than a normative or managerial-focused perspective. Specifically, the use of the interview method provides unique insights into the various ways organizational members seek to express voice and exert agency prior to, during and even after exit in response to shifting organizational structures and power dynamics. Eliciting participants' lived experiences leading up to exit highlights both the experiences and associated memories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), adding new depth to our understanding of the organizational exit phenomenon.

RECRUITMENT AND PARTICIPANTS

Participants were recruited using convenience and snowball sampling, beginning with the author's existing professional network (which spans several industries) and through referrals from interviewees. Diversity was sought in terms of workforce tenure, organizational tenure, industry, job level, geography, age, income, ethnicity and gender. This diversity is important given the macro level focus on identifying and examining the similarities and differences that exists in the exit experience across industries and worker demographics in a post-recession economy. Table 1 shows the average age of participant by gender, as well as relationship status. The average age for women was 34.8 and 34.3 for men. The majority of both men and women were in some type of partner relationship.

| | Total Number | Average Age | Marital Status | | |
|-------|--------------|-------------|----------------|--------|--------------------------|
| | | | Married | Single | Single – in relationship |
| Women | 34 | 34.8 | 20 | 10 | 4 |
| Men | 27 | 34.3 | 17 | 5 | 5 |

Table 1: Participant Age and Relationship Status

Table 2 shows the ethnicities represented in this study. The majority were white. Two participants self-identified a bi-ethnic and were counted in both categories.

| Ethnicity | Participants (n=61) |
|---|---------------------|
| African American | 7 |
| Hispanic | 6 |
| Asian / Asian American | 2 |
| White | 48 |
| Note: Two participants self-identified as bi-ethnic, White/Asian and Hispanic/African American. These participants were counted in both categories. | |

Table 2: Participant Ethnicity

Sampling

The study sample was designed to represent the rich texture within and across cases of exit that occurred within the post-recessionary period of 2010-2014, with a broader goal of exploring connections across seemingly disparate cases. Participants came from a variety of industries, job types, and personal demographics, and shared a voluntary exit experience within a time of economic recession. Patton (1990) asserts that, rather than being a weakness, common patterns found between cases within a sample with great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared aspects of a phenomenon.

The sample consisted of individuals who have voluntarily left a job during the post-recessionary period of January 2010 through August 2014. The months preceding

this period—December 2007 through June 2009—were officially designated a recessionary period by the National Bureau of Economic Research. This difficult economic period is more commonly referred to as the “great recession of 2008,” a time of extensive unemployment in the U.S., which generated fear of job loss and the perception of a lack of employment alternatives.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), voluntary exit—or “quits” as defined by the BLS - tend to rise when there is a perception that another job is available and fall when there is a perception that jobs are scarce. As employers shed workers during the recession, involuntary layoffs and discharges outnumbered the number of voluntary exits. In August 2006, a year and a half before the official beginning of the recession, the ratio of quits to layoffs was 1.8, with almost two people voluntarily leaving their job for every person involuntarily laid off.

By April 2009, near the official end of the recession, this number had dipped to .7, meaning that less than one person quit for every person involuntarily laid off. Specifically, voluntary quits fell from 2.8 million in January 2007 to 1.9 million in February 2010, signaling both a lack of available new jobs and people’s reticence to leave their current positions during this period of recession. The period of gradual economic recovery (2010-2014) following this most recent recession provides a unique opportunity to explore the power of organizational communication antecedents to organizational exit. As these statistics illustrate, tough economic conditions contributed to an overall employee reticence to leave one’s job, resulting in generally lower rates of voluntary exit during the recession and a gradual increase in exits once the economy began improving. In June 2013, the ratio of quits to layoffs had once again increased to 1.4, double the mid-recession rate of .7 (NBER, August 2013).

Interviews were conducted between July 2013 and August 2014. This timeframe was recent enough after exit (ranging from one week to three years after exit) that individuals could recall specific organizational and personal factors related to their decision to exit their previous organizations. Conversely, it was distant enough from their exit experiences that participants had time to consider how the experience influenced their views about work and careers.

Table 3 shows the number of jobs participants have had during their entire career, as well as the number since the recession. The highest number of full-time jobs a participant had during their career was 12, while the lowest number of jobs was one. Total full-time jobs since 2007 was 2.7 meaning that participants had on average two additional jobs besides the one they had voluntarily exited. The highest number of full-time jobs an individual had since 2007 was eight. Job functions of participants in the jobs they exited included customer service, education, engineering, finance and accounting, Human Resources, information technology (IT), manufacturing, marketing, research and development (R&D), and sales and business development. An “Other” category captured individual professions in the military, law, culinary arts, and child care.

| | |
|--|-----|
| Total full-time jobs in career | 4.9 |
| Total full-time jobs since 2007 (i.e., beginning of recession) | 2.7 |

Table 3: Count of Total Full-Time Jobs

Table 4 captures participants’ tenure in their exited jobs. The majority of participants had tenure of one of five years. This aligns with national job tenure data, which indicates that for the years 2012-2014, the average job tenure in the paid U.S workforce was 4.6 years (NBER, September 2014). Nationally, tenure tends to be higher among older workers (10.4 years among those age 55-64, and 3.0 years for workers age

25-34). Tenure also tends to be lower in service occupations, averaging 3.3 years, and even lower for those working in food preparation (2.2 years).

| Tenure | Number of Participants |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Less than 6 months | 4 |
| More than 6 months, less than a year | 7 |
| 1 – 5 years | 39 |
| 6 – 10 years | 6 |
| 11 – 15 years | 4 |
| More than 15 years | 1 |

Table 4: Organizational Tenure in Exited Job

Table 5 shows the self-identified job level of participants in the jobs they exited. The largest number of interviewees were specialist/individual contributors. Job titles are listed from lowest hierarchical level to the highest hierarchical level.

| Job Level | Number of Participants |
|---|------------------------|
| Manufacturing / Retail (front line level) | 7 |
| Administrative Assistant / Support Staff | 6 |
| Specialist / Individual contributor | 28 |
| Manager without direct reports | 9 |
| Manager with direct reports | 6 |
| Director | 1 |
| Vice President / C-level executive | 4 |

Table 5: Job Level in Exited Job

Table 6 shows the salary level of participants, as well as whether their new job paid higher, lower, or the same as the job they left. For participants who were not

currently working, the final three columns indicate if they were currently searching for a job, in school, or retired.

| Income at Exit | Total | New Job - Salary | | | Not working - Status | | |
|---------------------|-------|------------------|------|-------|----------------------|-----------|---------|
| | | Higher | Same | Lower | Job search | In school | Retired |
| Less than \$24,999 | 9 | 5 | 1 | 1 | -- | 2 | -- |
| \$25,000 – 34,999 | 10 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 | -- |
| \$35,000 – 49,999 | 10 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 1 | 1 | -- |
| \$50,000 – 74,999 | 13 | 8 | 1 | 3 | -- | -- | 1 |
| \$75,000 – 99,999 | 9 | 5 | 1 | 1 | -- | 2 | -- |
| \$100,000 – 249,999 | 8 | 4 | -- | 4 | -- | -- | -- |
| \$250,000 or more | 2 | 1 | -- | -- | -- | -- | 1 |

Table 6: Income Level in Exited Job and New Job, Including Status of Individuals Not Currently Working

Interviewees were selected using convenience and snowball sampling, with a focus on achieving variety in terms of respondent age, job type (blue collar versus white collar), organizational tenure, workforce tenure, and industry. The interview method was selected as the tool for this project because as Charmaz (2006) explains, qualitative methods such as interviewing allow a researcher to be “reflexive about what we bring to the scene, what we see, and how we see it” (p.15). Given that the purpose of this study was to explore individuals’ sensemaking related to a variety of organizational dynamics that may have contributed to their exit decision, the ability to probe specific responses and explore respondents’ sense-making processes make the interview method most appropriate choice for this research. Additionally, this study is designed to offer new insights into organizational exit and various micro, meso and macro-level organizational communication antecedents based on the lived experience of workers (Sias, Krone, & Jablin, 2002). Negative cases, those that offer perspectives different from the majority of

participants, were explored to uncover a clearer understanding of the boundaries and limits of the exit phenomena (Charmaz, 2006; Emigh, 1997).

DATA COLLECTION

Interviews were conducted via telephone (n=55) and in person (n=6), in order to reach across geographies and access diversity of industry experience. A total of 61 interviews were conducted. Interviews lasted from between 45 minutes and 1 hour, 20 minutes, with an average of approximately 60 minutes. Each respondent was asked a series of questions about their experiences on the job, their exit experience and their postexit reflections about the overall experience. Each respondent also completed a short demographic questionnaire regarding their job type, industry and tenure, as well as personal demographics such as age, marital status and tenure with their previous employer. With the interviewee's permission, all interviews were audio-recorded (one interviewee requested to not be audio recorded, so written notes were used to capture her responses.) Notes were also taken during all interviews and theoretical notes were composed throughout the interview and analysis process to capture emerging connections and themes within and across interviews.

Prior to the beginning of each in-person interview, I distributed the Internal Review Board's (IRB) consent form, collecting a signed copy and providing the interviewee a copy of the form for their records. For phone interviews, the IRB consent form and demographic survey were emailed prior to the interview and verbal consent was confirmed prior to beginning the interview (the latter process approved by the IRB Office). Each interviewee was asked to provide a pseudonym as an identifier for the transcription file.

Recorded interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. I then reviewed each transcription, with special attention to clarifying any questions noted by the transcriptionist, as well as verifying the overall quality of the transcription. During this transcription review, the file was sanitized of any information that may have identified the interviewee or other individuals mentioned during the interview, such as the names of friends, family, company or colleagues. The process of simultaneously listening to the audio and reviewing the transcript allowed me to immerse myself in the data and record initial analytic thoughts generated by the data.

DATA ANALYSIS

Interviewing allows a researcher to fully explore a research participant's perceptions and experiences related to organizational change. In keeping with Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) metaphor of interviewer as miner, digging through stories as a coal miner digs through walls of coal, or a gold miner sifts through earth. Here, rather than lumps of coal or nuggets of gold, the rewards were big stories and small details told in members' own words that brought new understanding of the ways these organizational members attempted to make sense of and respond to organizational communication, structures and relationships they navigated in their daily work lives. Unearthing members' perspectives on these direct or indirect messages helped bring new understanding to the organizational actions that lead employees to begin de-identifying (Davis & Myers, 2012) with or disconnecting from the organization. Grounded theory is an especially appropriate methodology for studying this issue given its focus on understanding the temporality and process (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) of events and individuals' related sense making. The process of three stages of coding helps identify the boundaries and relationships that compose the topic (Creswell, 2007).

Constant Comparative Method

When using grounded theory, data is sorted into categories as additional data is still being collected and analyzed. Glaser and Strauss (1967) call the process of simultaneously collecting and assessing pieces of data to one another, the constant comparative method. When using the constant comparative method, one works closely with the data, sorting, sifting, uniting concepts, and ultimately offering an explanation rooted in the specific words and experiences of participants. Detailed notes taken during the interview and coding processes helps identify ideas, thoughts and connections within each interview, especially in relation to areas of consistency or inconsistency. The constant comparative method compares the data to itself, then compares it to existing categories, and then compares categories to other categories (Charmaz, 2005). The method is focused on gaining an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon, not to make claims about universality or generalizability (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In the short-term, such insights are helpful for identifying areas of focus for future interviews, and in the longer-term they assist with the theory building process. The constant comparative method results in a middle-range theory that explains a phenomenon using participants' lived experience within the context of research questions (Boeije, 2002; Charmaz, 2005).

Accordingly, the first step used in this study was to compare the data itself (Boeije, 2002; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Participants' comments were compared to other comments she made within the same interview to identify areas of apparent consistency or inconsistency (revealed in part by probing questions asked during the interview). After the interview, theoretical memos were created to identify connections within and between interviews, resulting in an ever-deepening understanding of the concepts under study as the number of interviews increased.

The second phase of the constant comparative method involved comparing one interview to another (Boeije, 2002). This was done by comparing interviews conducted with two similar participants, or by comparing interviews with two different types of participants. For example, I compared an interview with a new college graduate to someone who had over 10 years of paid work experience, revealing the role of previous work experience in the content and timeline of sensemaking leading up to an exit decision. A younger, new college graduate decided to exit over confusion between his initial expectation and what the job actually involved, as well as frustration from unexpectedly being thrust into an unstructured and chaotic work environment. In contrast a more tenured member of the paid workforce left based on and conflict she felt between the perceived values of the organization and her own personal values and professional ethics, as well as a clearer understanding of the types of treatment she would not tolerate from the organization (i.e., management she experienced as incompetent). In these instances, exit decisions were mediated by their previous work experience (or lack thereof) and related sensemaking processes. This sample comparison reveals just some of the many shades of similarities and differences in exit-related decision-making process across this sample.

Open Coding

The coding process began with open coding, the process of applying codes to words, phrases or paragraphs contained in each interview (Saldana, 2009), selecting a segment of text that represents a concept relevant to the subject being studied. Charmaz (2006) underscores the need to work with “speed and spontaneity” during open coding, crafting individual codes that reflect the content for which it is named, as well as the meaning the participant attached to it. Charmaz (2006) gives the example from her own

research of modifying a code from “receiving news indirectly” to “receiving second hand information” (p. 48) as the latter reflected more fully the respondent’s emotional reaction and perception of lesser status communicated to her via how she received the information (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). To this point, special attention was paid to in vivo codes—special terms used by the participants themselves (Charmaz, 2006).

As the previous examples illustrate, ultimately, the process used to generate grounded theory must not only “explicate the dimensional scope of the phenomena of interest, but also enable comprehensive description of the trajectory of the phenomena over time” (Morse, 2007, p. 229). Consistent with this temporal process—and the constant comparative method in general—additional notes were taken during the open coding process to help identify ideas, thoughts and connections within each interview, especially in relation to areas of consistency or inconsistency within an interview. In the short-term such insights were helpful for identifying areas of focus for future interviews, and in the longer term assisted with the theory building process. At the beginning of open coding, a total 1035 codes existed—at the end of this step, based on combining similar codes and eliminating duplicates, 742 codes existed.

Focused Coding

During focused coding, previous codes were revisited and categories consolidated or expanded to most fully capture the multidimensional nature of each existing code. Individual codes were combined into broader codes that reflected the multiple dimensions of a single concept identified across the experiences of multiple participants (Boeije, 2002). One of the goals of focused coding was to achieve category saturation, which is reached when “no new properties, dimensions, conditions, actions/interactions, or consequences are seen in the data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 136). Saldana (2009)

refers to focused coding as the “transitional cycle” between initial coding and theoretical coding. One additional note, Saldana (2009) and Charmaz (2006) discuss axial coding as an advanced form of focused coding where codes are broken into categories and subcategories. Axial coding begins to establish the relationship between codes, answering questions such as when, where, why, and with what consequence. By establishing these relationships, this process reassembles the data into a cohesive whole as a researcher moves toward theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2006). At the completion of focused coding, there were 20 core categories with a total of 273 individual codes.

Theoretical Coding

In this final stage of constructing a grounded theory, focus turned to fully identifying and integrating the concepts that emerged during earlier stages of coding. Although in previous stages, presuppositions or reference to existing theories was avoided, theoretical coding was peripherally guided by Jablin’s assimilation model (1987), Weick’s (1995) theory of sense making, Giddens’ structuration theory (1984), and Sias, Krone, and Jablin’s (2001) concept of organizations as ecological systems, as well as the research questions established for this study. During this process, conceptual sorting of previously written memos (Holton, 2007; Saldana, 2009) helped to build a grounded theory using the findings from the previous rounds of open, focused and axial coding.

Prior to theoretical coding, focused and axial coding created saturated codes and established initial relationships between those codes. Together, these analyses generated a theoretical understanding of individual agency and sense making processes leading up to organizational exit, and how individuals’ perceptions regarding the communicative nature of organizational events, particularly various types of changes experienced within their

specific organization, ultimately influenced organizational exit decisions and processes. The resulting theory is firmly grounded in participants’ experiences and rigorously constructed using the grounded theory methodology detailed in this document. Theoretical coding resulted in a total of six super-axial codes (sensemaking, the selfish system, leadership, managers, coworkers, work and change), with a seventh representing a comprehensive, updated model of organizational exit. One especially important note, due to the depth and complexity of participants’ experiences—and the layers of sensemaking meaning they often associated with a single experience, some narratives were coded under more than one code. For example, a specific experience with a leader may have been coded within both a sensemaking code and a leader code. Table six provides a breakdown of the number of individual codes within each of the six super-axial codes.

| Super-axial code name | Individual codes (n=273) | Percentage of total individual codes (n=273) |
|---|--------------------------|--|
| Sensemaking – Chapter 4 | 31 | 11.4% |
| The Selfish System – Chapter 5 | 30 | 11.0% |
| Leadership - Chapter 6 | 48 | 17.6% |
| Managers – Chapter 7 | 20 | 7.3% |
| Coworkers – Chapter 8 | 45 | 16.5% |
| Forms of Work and Change – Chapter 9 | 39 | 14.3% |
| A New Understanding of Organizational Exit – Chapter 10 | 60 | 21.9% |

Table 7: Number of Individual Codes Within Each Super-Axial Code

Validity, Reliability and Limitations

A number of steps helped ensure these findings provide a trustworthy account of current organizational exit dynamics. Theoretical sampling identified similarities across seemingly disparate groups of the sample population—for example, individuals who are

new to the full-time workforce and those who have decades of experience. Similarly, comparisons were made between individuals in blue collar versus white collar professions, and managerial versus line level employees.

Additionally, elements of triangulation verified the existence of phenomena across this diverse sample. Triangulation is recommended to increase validity and reliability (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Creswell, 2007; Golafshani, 2003). This process uses different sources of information that lead the researcher to different sources that corroborate information (Golafshani, 2003). In this way, the diversity of the sample provided evidence of the depth and diversity of the exit-related phenomena present and how they are similar across multiple industries and job levels. Furthermore, the comparison of field notes and theoretical memos across multiple interviews allowed analysis of the phenomena from multiple perspectives. Analysis of negative cases—in this instance, individuals who left for reasons other than issues related to their daily experiences within the organization—further strengthened the trustworthiness of these findings, and category saturation provided evidence of the validity of interview findings.

Given the depth and breadth of participants' backgrounds and experiences, the data set is particularly large. Findings provide a devastating critique of an experience that is universal across industries, job levels and organizational tenures. The experiences described in this data are not isolated or unique. Direct quotation was used extensively in reporting the findings for two reasons. First, experiences were bound up in each participant's history with the organization and fellow members. No one could articulate these experiences or their interdependence in shaping participants' assessments and exit-related sensemaking better than the participants themselves. Second, special attention was paid to ensuring representation of participant diversity in detailing the dimensions of each code. For example, when two direct quotations are used to illustrate a code, one quotation

may come from an executive level individual (i.e., vice president of supply chain), while the other comes from a specialist/individual contributor (i.e., marketing specialist).

As these mini-narratives illustrate, participant experiences are intense and complex in a way not documented in current organizational exit literature. However, as the findings demonstrate, these experiences are not unusual in today's post-recession, productivity and profit-focused public and private organizations. For these reasons, the pages of this study are dedicated to bringing participants' experiences—through their own voices—to the surface. Paraphrasing and summarizing are used to highlight broader themes and connections across cases.

Reflexivity

Qualitative research, and grounded theory in particular, account for the role of the researcher in exploring a topic with her participants. Strauss and Corbin (1990) use the term theoretical sensitivity to account for the skill and readiness a researcher brings to a project, including “the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and the capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn't” (p. 42). Such skill and awareness is especially important for organizational exit research, given that the exit decision and process can be quite multifaceted and complex. My personal experience with organizational change and exit during the post-recessionary period provided a helpful foundation for this study, yet the updated conceptualization of exit represented here goes far deeper than my single experience, based on the openness of the individuals who graciously shared their stories, sharing the wide-ranging, yet similar, experiences, observations and insights through which they lived and which this updated theory of organizational exit is based.

Chapter 4: Sensemaking Leading Up to Exit

A decision to exit marks the culmination of a process filled with observation, experience and analysis as individuals try to figure out “What is going on here?” and “How do I feel about this?” and, “What does this mean to me, for me?” In a comprehensive review of the existing sensemaking literature, Maitlis and Christianson (2014) describe the sensemaking process as one rooted in observing and analyzing “strange,” “discrepant” and “disparate” (p. 72) environmental cues. This sensemaking process can take place over a long period of time, or more rapidly, as some occurrences “make sense” immediately, whereas as others require observation of more cues over a longer period of time. Sensemaking is also influenced by one’s overall experiences within a particular organization, as well as additional context provided by previous work experience and the sensegiving efforts of other individuals or the organization itself (Pratt, 2000).

Participants’ comments revealed active sensemaking throughout their organizational tenures, with many participants describing an exit decision that was more gradual, occurring over months, and even years. Rebecca shared that she began considering exit seven years before the date of her actual exit, then engaged in continuous “back and forth” sensemaking about her decision as she worked her current job while also returning to school to prepare for her intended new profession. For others, however, the decision was more immediate. For Chloe, an exit decision followed rapidly after several meetings within just a few months with her supervisor, manager and Human

Resources in which she was repeatedly surprised at being treated as a threat by those from whom she sought guidance. A workforce newcomer, Chloe did not realize that her questions were inadvertently raising issues related to the ethics of her manager and the organization. A final surprise meeting with her manager and a Human Resources staff member solidified Chloe's understanding of "what was going on," resulting in her decision to leave, which she did within just weeks of that last meeting. Lee, Mitchell and Wise's (1999, 1994) unfolding model of voluntary turnover accounts for the role these types of "shocks" play in exit, especially when preceded with feelings of dissatisfaction related to one's current job situation and comparisons to other potential jobs. As the experiences of Rebecca and Chloe illustrate, participants' sensemaking processes also varied in length of time and reflected a variety of Topics across the micro, meso and macro levels of the organization (Sias, Krone & Jablin, 2002).

Specific Sensemaking Topic codes included: Organizational Decision-making, Organizational Ethics, Organizational Image, Organizational Processes, Organizational Policies, Own Judgment and Choices, Profession's Values, Quality of Organization's Work, and Unspoken Organizational Values. These sensemaking topics are discussed below. Later in this chapter, the sensemaking realizations that became key Decision Points will be reviewed, as will be the organizational responses to participants' expressions of employee voice, which involves "actively and constructively trying to improve conditions through discussing problems with a supervisor or coworkers, taking action to solve problems, suggesting solutions, seeking help from an outside agency like a union or whistleblowing" (Rusbult et al., p. 601).

SENSEMAKING TOPICS

In total, categories reflect a level of awareness and consideration of the micro, meso and macro levels of organizational dynamics. In general, sensemaking focus differed based on one's job level. Leadership level individuals focused on making sense of factors influencing their own level of decision-making authority in the organization with a goal of wanting financial compensation that reflected the value of their high-level strategic contribution. Lower-level employees (manager and specialist roles) focused more on issues related to day-to-day operations, team decision-making, performance evaluation issues and coworker relationships.

Exceptions to these generalities did exist and were worth noting. For example, Jean, a senior vice president of consulting firm, noted that ongoing sabotage and related public comments about her performance to others by a fellow leader was the major reason she chose to exit. Conversely, the traditional power hierarchy was condensed in smaller and family-owned organizations, providing lower level individuals greater awareness and concern about more strategic issues—and making leaders, in some cases, more aware of tactical and interpersonal issues.

Organizational Decision-Making

This code refers to situations in which participants were making sense of reasons for—and outcomes of—decisions at the personal, team, managerial, leadership, and/or organizational levels. Sam, 21, dropped out of college after meeting Brandon at a campus event. Brandon offered Sam the opportunity to assume a leadership role in the company for which Brandon was currently serving as CEO:

Brandon was going to be leaving the company. He was on a contract for CEO for three years. He had about two years left on his contract, and he pretty much told me that he was prepping me to become his replacement. When he bought the company, he was looking at selling it to some more investors to help expand the

company, and as part of his starting the company, the new investors needed to know, “Okay, well, when you leave, who’s going to take your spot?”...The reason I left was because there was a lot of talk and no show or no immediate show. The problem is he couldn’t guarantee a lot of things. He would say a lot of things, but couldn’t guarantee them, and to his defense, I think he couldn’t guarantee just because there was a lot of unknowns.

Alison, a school psychologist, spoke of feeling a responsibility to be the voice of students during staff meetings, trying to help ensure decisions about health care services for special education students were based on data:

If I felt like there were concerns or things that we needed to consider before we made a certain decision, I felt like I was somewhat of the student’s voice in that situation. I just tried to raise any concerns that might be present or any data that we had that might be driving some of our decisions.

Organizational Ethics

This code refers to participants’ efforts to make sense of potential ethical issues within the organization, as well as find a way to individually navigate the situation. Chloe spoke of realizing that she had unintentionally caused problems for her manager when she asked Human Resources how to navigate a client relationship when her company did not have a signed contract on file with that client:

My manager got in a lot of trouble because what was happening was illegal. That’s not what I meant to happen. Human Resources was like, “You didn’t do anything wrong. He did. You just reported it.” I was like, “I don’t think he meant to do it.” [HR said,]“Whether or not he meant to do it or not doesn’t matter.” That came back to bite me because then he passed me over for a job that I could have done.

Nora, an accountant, spoke of ongoing conflict with her boss who consistently pressured her not to file required paperwork in order to avoid paying certain payroll taxes:

There are a lot of situations where dishonesty and ethics come into play...I have to report 1099 income to any persons that are non-employees that meet a certain criteria according to the IRS...Well, he’s constantly trying to get me to not obey

that rule...in order to avoid [paying] taxes for other people. We constantly have fights over that...but he knew that at some point in time, that I wasn't budging on that.

Unspoken Organizational Values

This code captures instances where participants recognized the unspoken values of the organization that drove many of the workplace expectations they observed or experienced. John reflected on the unspoken racism he realized led to his exclusion from informal job training and social network on his team:

Racism doesn't mean you have to call somebody the 'n' word...I think racism has taken on a new tone. We can't use the 'n' word—I mean look what happened with Paula Deen. She did some things true enough, but what they got upset was because she used the 'n' word. What I'm saying is, as long as you don't use that, you're probably okay...You can't really do anything about it because it's so small that you have to be almost—oh my God—a genius to point it out.

Rebecca realized that she needed to place limits on how much of her time and energy she would give her company, as the organization would continue to take as much as she was willing to give:

I realize that at any company—it's not just Global Tech—any job will never be satisfied with everything that you give it. You have to be the one to control that—how much you're willing to give. Because you can give and give and give and give. And at the end of the day, you have to know what you're going to get back out of it. Which is a really selfish thing to think of and it's hard for me to think that way because it feels very selfish. But if you don't look after your own health and life, nobody else will. They'll let you give everything to it.

Organizational Processes

This code captures participants making sense of why organizational processes are implemented, followed or not followed—and the outcome that resulted. Jacob questioned the usefulness and appropriateness of his organization's use of Six Sigma processes:

We were told that the plan was—well, the first thing they did was they brought in a Six Sigma Lean advisor and forced us to do these Six Sigma workshops, strip out any non-value added activities—spending an inordinate amount of time in these workshops, which I felt were maybe good if you’re making widgets, not so much if you’re working on private equity funds.”

Andie was concerned that her boss, the company CEO, was prioritizing expansion because of the short-term revenue it generated, rather than considering what was truly in the best long-term interest of the company:

If you have a concept that you’re excited about and you can sell for a \$25,000 franchise fee, and you then are going to have to provide them with proprietary trade secret ingredients. You’re going to make money off of that as well. You’re excited about being able to get that franchise up and running. And there’s some ego involved in being able to spread the name of your company around.

Organizational Values

This code refers to participants’ questioning of organizational values, conflicts between those values, and how or why different values were prioritized by the organization in a given situation. Paul, a bank auditor, was troubled his organization’s prioritizing of speed over quality and accuracy:

A good case in point was when we were looking at real estate appraisal. It just got to the point where I couldn’t even take the time to analyze the three approaches of how they arrived at their valuation...I couldn’t even take the time anymore to dig to see if that stuff was adequately presented and if it justified the valuation, simply because of the need to get through the file. That’s why I just knew I wasn’t comfortable in that environment.

Rick was frustrated by his company’s focus on billable hours, rather than on the productivity achieved during hours worked, which led the company to go back on their promise that employees would be able to work less hours during the summer:

With “loyalty” and these others words, I saw that at work when they promised you working X amount during the summer—and then they’d pack on mandatory hours. The problem with doing stuff that way is that your managing to how much hours you’re working, and that shouldn’t be how you manage it, a person or a

person's job. It should be about the work that they get done. That's another part of it, too—they've got these higher level objectives and higher level goals and philosophies that the company had that don't really get put into practice. It's kind of just a front almost to how things really are there.

Organizational Policies

This code captures instances where participants questioned the depth, focus, helpfulness, and rationale for organizational policies. While he found the detailed software development process tedious at times, Chris ultimately understood that the policies he had to follow helped ensure the quality of the products his team developed:

I mean, it'd become annoying sometimes from a work perspective, but it's understood because some of the things [processes] that were in place were to make a better product. If you have a product that doesn't have high quality, then obviously you're going to take a hit to your product name or your company name—obviously you're not as profitable, especially when the competitors have better quality products than you do. So, I think they had a purpose, and I think they were generally positive.

Rebecca questioned the promotion process used at her global telecommunication company, which resulted in people getting promoted to management without the training and support needed to successfully manage others:

Here's another source of my discontent with GlobalTech. They don't train people—you might come in as an HTML coder. Then they say, "You know what? You need to be a manager today." All the sudden you're a manager and you have no skills, no background in it. They may have on-line courses that are free or whatever, but they don't require it. So, people become managers that have no—they're not set up for it. They're set up for failure. Just like my husband being put into an IT project manager [role] – people spend their whole lives trying to learn to be a good IT project manager. And he's just thrown into it.

Own Judgment or Choices

This code captures participants' reflections on the effectiveness of their daily choices on the job, as well as their longer term career choices. Rita blamed herself for accepting a job in which she felt she was "getting more dumb each day:"

I just only knew that I put myself in that position, that I accepted this job, and I'm literally getting more dumb each day. And that's a true statement. I couldn't believe that I was sharing an office with this woman who just is not intelligent, and shouldn't be in that position, and I think that I was smarter than every single person in that whole company. I think I lost some confidence, big time. I lost some confidence.

Sam questioned his decision to drop out of college to pursue a career opportunity, yet constructed an understanding as to why the person who hired him ultimately did not provide the opportunity in the timeframe that Sam had initially expected:

I left a very good situation at State U, left a job at State U, left a lot of friends at State U. It was a very tough decision. So, to be where I was at, kind of reflecting on that, it was like, "Well, is this where I really should be, where I need to be, the best place for me?" Thoughts would come in my mind as well. Time was of the essence, and so that's kind of when my thoughts were like, "Well, maybe I need to re-evaluate." I was going between re-evaluating where I was at, versus, "Okay, this is just a road hump that I have to get over, and it'll all be fine after that." It took longer than expected, understandable, fine, whatever. Then when I got to Memorial [second assigned job site], that kind of pissed me off the most, because it was a repeat situation.

Profession's Values

This code captures participants' questioning the values of their chosen profession and the degree to which these match their personal values. In some instances, participants used comparisons to other potential professions in this sensemaking, Sara was conflicted, as she enjoyed teaching advertising, but questioned the values of the advertising profession:

I always say I love to hate advertising. This is the subject that I'm being paid to teach and really embrace in a way that helps students develop their portfolios.

The sort of love/hate relationship I had with advertising made it difficult to feel honest about that - the nature of advertising to demand attention for things that aren't necessities and are pushed to get products and services noticed, by any means. It was a frustration to have to talk about how to gain awareness for things that weren't necessities, to bombard whatever the population was, with things that are annoying to ourselves.

Based on observations of female leaders within the firm she exited, Samantha questioned the degree to which the consulting profession fit for her, while partially blaming herself for her uncertainty:

I think that consulting is probably not the profession I'll always be in because I'm not very competitive—and I don't feel like my job is my life. I don't get that kind of value out of my job in the same way that she did [senior female leader]. And she didn't have any kids and rumor had it she was having an affair with the CFO. I liked her—I thought she was nice. I just was like—I couldn't relate. But maybe part of that was my age and lack of maturity in that sense, too.

Quality of Organization's Work

This code captures instances where participants questioned the priorities of the organization or the quality of the work produced by the organization, often sensing a disconnect with the way they felt things should be done. Alisa questioned her school's lack of recognition that one size did not fit all student in terms of curriculum:

I felt like a drill sergeant for the majority of the year, just trying to get them to do what they need to do for reading strategies. It's just like this whole web of strategies that Somewhere ISD would try to have us implement with them. Some of them I didn't think were developmentally appropriate for a third grade student. It might be appropriate for middle schools, but it's not developmentally appropriate for a third grade kid.

Samantha expressed concern about the quality of the research her firm was providing to their clients, and the questionable rationale a colleague offered to justify the quality and rigor of the organization's work:

I didn't trust their work at a certain point. I trusted the work I was doing, but I didn't trust the work we were providing as a company on the whole. We should have better experts leading our big studies. And we should have more than a

sample size of ten. I questioned, immediately, the statistical validity of the work that we were producing. I was told that it's not, "We're not claiming it's statistically valid. We're highlighting best practices." Nobody looks at data and looks at the end and says, "Oh, they must just be highlighting best practices." I think it just kind of further degraded my sense of the work we were doing as a whole, as a company, [and] the value it provided.

The various topics of sensemaking in this section reflect active, engaged thought about their role in and value to the organization, as well as initial signs that perhaps this job, organization or profession is not a good long-term match for them based on values differences noted in various organizational culture topics highlighted above. The next section will describe sensemaking events that were noted as especially critical leading up to the participants' eventual decision to exit.

SENSEMAKING DECISION POINTS

Sensemaking on the Topics noted above led participants to generate their own rationale for the organizational culture and member behaviors, which in turn became a Decision Point about their individual response. Decision Points were either incremental or definitive. For example, Feeling Surprised or Feels Like Being Tested were incremental Decision Points—part of several smaller decision factors that occurred over a period of time leading up to an exit decision. In contrast, a Turning Point was definitive, generating immediate action toward exit. Specific sensemaking Decision Points included noticing or experiencing: Differential Treatment, External Comparisons, Feeling Surprised, Feeling like a Test, Forecasting the Future, Realizing How the Boss Sees You, Realizing What's Typical, Schizo-identification (Humphreys and Brown, 2002), and Turning Point.

Differential Treatment

This code refers to experiencing or observing differential treatment among organizational members based on the value assigned to certain types of work, member seniority, member demographics and/or the physical closeness/co-location of members. In some instances, the participant reflected on their own experiences, whereas other narratives spoke about seeing colleagues treated differently. Nicole noticed that her older, more tenured colleagues were treated differently than those who were younger and newer to the organization, like the new department leader:

At that time, there was more of a status divide between more senior staff and newer staff on how to do things within the department. I know senior staff had different opinions. That seemed to be kind of a source of contention.

Based on her experience in both roles, Alexis spoke of the difference in how the work of internal administrative staff was viewed compared to that of revenue-generating client service staff:

There's a very clear delineation between "We bring in the money and you don't. And so your initiatives, your priorities, your activities when on my schedule as a client-facing individual—they're going to take a lower priority because they have to. They don't pay the bills." And I was fine with that, because that's the perspective that I came from as well...A lot of people had trouble with that, though.

External Comparisons

In this code participants referenced examples from their own outside/previous job experiences, others' people lives, or media to make sense of their workplace experiences. Zach referenced a television show to highlight the problem of giving every employee the same raise rather than differentiating compensation based on actual performance:

I love referring to *The Office*. I don't know if you ever watched that show. There's the episode where Dunder Mifflin has a surplus and they're deciding how to give raises. And they have the bean method. One of the things was, "Oh, let's give everyone two beans." Yeah, sure, that is the easy way. But I would challenge

universities in general to have more measures of success on how to track that success, with goals in having to chart your numbers—and then the ultimate goal being more merit raises, as opposed to everyone just getting a simple cost adjustment.”

Brad explained how he left his construction job based on his belief that the “grass is greener,” but felt different after quitting it the first time:

You always think that the grass is greener on the other side. After so many years, I just wanted to try something else, and found out that that wasn’t a good fit. He let me come back. I was there again for a while and wanted to try a different type of construction work... When I left the first time, I moved out to Vegas with a buddy of mine. It just wasn’t the right timing and the job wasn’t the right fit. I ended up just coming back because it just wasn’t working out. He gave me my job back. I figured if he’d give me my job back it can’t be too bad.”

Feeling Surprised

This code refers to being caught off guard in a way that disrupts one’s existing understanding of organizational dynamics or values. Sara was surprised when she saw her profession through the eyes of children at her organization’s Parents’ Day:

It was actually Parents Day again—it’s interesting that both of these involve little kids...It was a game in which different logos were flashed up on the screen and kids had to shout out who the company was. They would see the McDonald’s logo, “McDonald’s!” And a bank logo and MasterCard logo. And they knew all of these. It made me really sad because I felt like I would rather see images of trees being shown on the PowerPoint and kids shouting what the tree names were...It was such a visceral [reaction for me] —and I knew at that point that I wouldn’t be in advertising much longer.

As a newly hired contracted building receptionist, Krissy was surprised at the way the employees in the building she worked treated her when she was not able to help them with something:

It was probably three weeks after I started because my coworker, she actually had to go have a hysterectomy. That’s a pretty major surgery, so she was out for a couple of weeks and I had only been there for three weeks, so I didn’t really get to learn a whole lot before she left. Well, I had two pretty high up employees that came to me asking me a question about something that I had no clue about.

It was actually the day of her surgery, so I couldn't try to call her and figure it out through her. They started screaming at me and talking to me like I'm stupid and just being really harsh and ugly. I actually had to leave and go outside because I started crying because I was very thin skinned at that point. I didn't have thick skin at all, so that was definitely the first instance I had that I was like, "Okay, this might not be as great as I was hoping it would be here if everybody's going to be like this."

Feels Like Being Tested

This code captures examples of figuring out that the organization has unspoken rules and performance expectations for you, on which they were unknowingly being tested. Ron became frustrated with how his organization used paperwork-based discipline instead of conversation-based problem-solving to ensure quality work:

It got to a point where it did not matter what you did, if your signature wasn't on a piece of paper, or if we stepped anywhere out of line, they would block you off, like you were done. It kind of also created a bigger culture of fear than the military, which is kind of ironic.

Ivy spoke of having to figure out that her "real" role on a particular consulting project was much more than just implementing the logistics of the change management plan:

I was brought in to do like communications plan, training plan, change management plan. It was really tactical. Like, we need to build organizational change management capabilities alongside of those projects. But really, I was brought in to help him be a more effective leader. I sorted that out, but it took a long time...Nobody told me, because nobody trusted me. They weren't sure if I was going to make it because I saw people getting kicked out of there on a daily basis. It's such a weird place. But once we sorted that out, it was like, 'Okay. Good.' We finally got to the real point of why I was there.

Forecasting the Future

This code captures examples of when participants referenced concerns for their own future and/or those of their coworkers' as they made short and longer-term

workplace decisions. Paul spoke of realizing that the quality of his work would impact his coworkers in the future:

I wasn't slow, but I clearly wasn't one of the fastest people. And again, like I said, I was always going to lean more towards the quality side and make sure the worksheet was filled out. Because many times we'll go to that same bank again next year and that same loan may be selected again for a review. So, somebody's going to have a much easier time of it understanding that deal and to be able to use some of my financial information and only have to update...any new financial information received since my review.

Ryan referenced message themes he noted in his leader's communications as a source for increasing concern about his job security:

There was a lot of talk about—because it was a government position, about loss of hours and downsizing. And things were going too well then, just – it was a job that I really wanted and I really wanted to stay there. But when you start hearing about, “You may lose hours. You may lose pay,” it kind of makes you a little uncomfortable with your situation and how things are going to turn out.

Realizing How the Boss Sees You

This code captures examples of realizing, through reflection on verbal comments and experiences, how the boss feels about your role and value to the organization. Emily was excited by the way the leader in charge when she first joined the organization expressed a desire to help her grow her career with the firm:

I thought he was a strong leader. I thought he was smart and capable. And he promised me, if I hitched my wagon to his star, that he would work really hard at developing my skillset. I knew I was joining a team of experts and I was actually the most junior on the team, not only by expertise, but also by age. I was at least 20 years younger than the other youngest person on the team. So, I felt like he was really investing in my career future. I saw a true opportunity to grow with them. And quite honestly, thought I could be with the company for a while

Conversely, Melanie noticed how her principal saw his staff as separate—and less than—him and the school's students:

There was a lot of “you” versus “me” sort of talk. He let it be known that he was not there for the teachers, he was there to “protect the students from the teachers.” It was discouraging to say the least. You pour your life into the classroom and you put yourself through school and you go, “This is what I want to do. I want to change lives. I want to help kids.” And you get this person who views you as the enemy simply because he walked into a district, looked at some test scores and said, “You’re not teaching enough.” It was discouraging.

Darren was surprised to learn that his boss viewed him as a threat:

Some of the words he said were, “I get the feeling you’re trying to take my job.” He was one of the people that interviewed me, and was one of the reasons why I took the position. So, I told him as such. We socialized outside of work, so that’s why it came as a surprise to me that he would even think that, much less mention it in that way... Rather than saying, “Hey, we need to talk about some of the things you’re doing. You’re doing great here. This needs more improvement there.” It wasn’t anything like that. That’s how I would have approached the position with a subordinate... I think he was more trying to probe me to see how I responded what he thought was a challenge to his authority.”

Realizing What is Typical

This code refers to recognizing that a certain decision-making logic or outcome is “normal” and can be expected to happen. Lisa realized that the large advertising agency valued it preserving its social hierarchy more than innovation:

Basically, it’s like nepotism. It’s a good old boys club. As a company, did not value efficiency or like innovation or entrepreneurship—an entrepreneurial attitude. That was not valued. And that’s what I’m all about. Creating something new, creating something better. Getting things done. But, like I said, they’re just much more about who do you know, do you have the right to speak, who you’re related to, how did you get here.

Similarly, Chris observed that staff on the management track had more opportunities for advancement within his engineering-focused organization than did staff who wished to stay focused in technical roles:

It also looks bad from a morale standpoint because once you see that the people that have very high technical skills and capabilities are the ones that are leaving, as opposed to given the advancement opportunities that entice them to stay, you kind of feel there’s no ladder for you. At some point in time, management, well,

they kept on telling us that they were creating a technical ladder to try to mitigate this problem....The joke that I had is that it was really more of a Chutes and Ladders game, because once you got to a certain point, you just couldn't advance. I did see much higher retention on the management side, but from the technical side, you just saw a lot of attrition.

Schizo-identification

In this code (based on the term coined by Humphreys and Brown, 2002), participants reflected on which parts of the organization they identified with (or not) and why. Participants reflected on identifying with individual peers, other coworkers, managers, and/or leaders based on personal relationships, rather than with the organization overall. Based on the extreme hours and workloads placed upon him, Rick explained that he felt loyalty and identification with his coworkers, not the organization:

It just reaffirmed, you kind of knew it was a slave factory kind of thing, they kind of worked you like dogs there. I always taught myself, though, all I need to do is knock out so much of this thing, and I'll be able to move on to bigger and better things... Whatever loyalty I did have—it really wasn't there [to the company], my loyalty lied with me and my co-workers... You didn't have much loyalty to the company, you had more loyalty to the people that you're working with.

Peter explained that his loyalty was to his bar, his staff, and his profession as a bar manager, not the broader organization, which ran a successful regional chain of Hooters-style restaurants. The sexist values of the parent company bothered him, as did the required corporate paperwork that did not relate to the local music venue he managed for the company:

I didn't want to be perceived as being lazy, but there's a difference between working smart and working hard. That became a source of frustration in that I was doing Hot Babes paperwork [while he managed a music venue] —I mean, I always said, "I work at Scotty's Place, I don't work for Missouri Restaurants, Inc." I'm not a Hot Babes' guy. I don't relate to any of that. I like the little West

side bar that I was running, and I didn't really want to come along with the other people in my business group.

Turning Point

In this code, participants reflected on incidents that clearly triggered specific thoughts of exit. For Sally, after taking a contracted receptionist job that only paid \$10 an hour, then dealing with an abusive coworker and doing work that lacked any intellectual stimulation, the turning point came when a member of the company's purchasing department—where Sally really wanted to work—told Sally to forward her resume, and then Sally never heard anything back from the woman:

I talked to the purchasing department and let it be known that I was very interested, should they have a position and nothing ever came of it. There were people I know that were far less qualified than me doing [purchasing] work, but there was never any really interest or a follow-up on their part. It was just like, "Well, I'm wasting my time. I'm spinning my wheels. Why stay here making nothing and with the potential to go nowhere or make more money here?" I never really took that job with the expectation of staying there. I took the job with the expectation that there might be a possible opening to do something else, to get to know people in other departments or possibly even with the major corporation that we were working for, if I could get a spot working for them, because they pay way better.

Chloe's turning point was a meeting in which she thought she was going to get support, but was instead positioned as the source of the problem:

After that meeting where they berated me [supervisor and HR], I literally went home, looked up career places and started putting my resume together. That was the turning point. Within two weeks of that meeting, I contacted a career place, had somebody write my resume for me, teach me how to interview. And I had applied to like six or seven jobs. Then it was a month after that meeting that I got my interview with HealthView, where I'm working now. Then less than a week after that, I put in my two-week notice. It was very fast.

The sensemaking realizations reached in the examples described above illustrate participants' progress toward exit. Along the way, however, many also considered speaking up to share their concerns. Some participants did actually speak up, with mixed

results, while others shared specific reasons why they chose to remain silent about their experiences and concerns. The next section details the dynamics around speaking up, illustrating the another step on the path to exit.

Sensemaking Special Topic – Speaking Up

Organizational members are often encouraged by organizations to speak up about their ideas, concerns, and suggestions. Employee voice plays a particularly important role in both positive organizational issues, such as facilitating innovation (Drazin, Glynn, and Kazanjian, 1999) —and negative issues, such as reporting ethical violations. The experience of deciding whether or not to speak up when faced with problematic circumstances or a difficult personal choice was an extensive topic of sense making for participants. As a result, a specific set of codes was documented to capture the participants’ sensemaking related to their decisions to speak up or not. Three axial codes capture the individual and organizational dynamics related to Speaking Up, including: Speaking Up - Why, Speaking Up—Response and Speaking Up - Why Not.

Participants in this study shared a variety of reasons why they chose to Speak Up, including: Advocating for Others, Advocating for Self, Offering New Ideas, Protecting Professional Integrity, and Speaking on Behalf. Responses to speaking up received mostly negative responses from message recipients—typically managers and leaders—including: Being Silenced, Nothing We Can Do, and Told Area of Concern is Not Important. Perhaps unsurprisingly then, while often directly encouraged by organizations, participants also shared a variety of hidden reasons for why they chose not to Speak Up about issues they observed or experienced. Codes capturing the reasons why people did not speak up, included: Avoid Putting a Target on My Back, Deferring to Organizational Needs, Network Concerns, and Not My Place. First, the individual codes for Speaking

Up—Why will be reviewed, followed by Speaking Up—Response and Speaking Up—Why Not.

Speaking Up – Why

Advocating for Others

This code captures speaking up to share concern about how the organization's priorities or policies were affecting coworkers or customers (ie, clients, students). Based on her observation of classroom dynamics when teaching an advertising course that included graduate students and undergraduates, Sara spoke up to advocate for separate classes:

We had organized a graduate committee among the faculty to look at certain issues that needed to be addressed. And I brought up the fact that that class needed to be an undergraduate and graduate class—it needed to be separated. The undergraduates didn't enjoy the fact that the graduate students were in there. The graduate students talk a lot more; express their opinions a lot more in those classes. The undergrads...you would hear even less from the undergraduates than you normally would. And then the graduate students didn't appreciate the fact that they were in a graduate level class that was also being taught to undergraduates. So I raised that concern. The following semester, that was broken out as two classes.

Alison recalled speaking up for what she felt was the best classroom placement for a student she worked with as a school psychologist, only to have her concerns dismissed by her colleagues on the student's care team:

I can remember being in a meeting and the teachers and the administration were very adamant about putting a child in a very restrictive setting, away from his peers, basically, in a classroom all day with very little interaction with other people. Knowing the student, and knowing kind of some of their disabilities and kind of what was going on with them, I didn't feel like that was the best situation, the best solution for that problem. But I can remember being in a meeting and it was just very contentious and I felt like my viewpoint was not really being heard. And even if it was being heard, it was kind of being dismissed. I guess I felt like my opinion wasn't as strong as maybe some of the other people around the table.

Advocating for Self

This code captures examples of participants speaking up to advocate for the resources and/or support they needed to fulfill their job responsibilities, includes advocating for things promised by the organization. John spoke up to ask questions about why two of the plant's highest level leaders, the plant manager and the operations manager, were conducting his annual performance review, rather than his team lead, Jeff, who had regularly excluded John from informal team training sessions and social conversations:

Eventually what happened, is after I decided to leave, and after we'd had this big discussion with Bruce and Dave, and when they didn't call him in, and even when I questioned them—I said, “Wait a minute. Why are you doing my evaluation?” I asked Dave why was he doing my evaluation. He said, “Well, I'm doing your evaluation because--” I forgot what he said. But the question was why was Jeff not doing my evaluation. Like that. And he said, “Well I just wanted to do it.” I said, “Well how can you do a fair evaluation when you're not my direct supervisor? How do you know what's going on with me?” It's like that.

Kim asked her supervisor every few months when she would receive her performance review, only to be told simply that she was doing a good job:

Several times, I would just ask straight up: “Hey, are we going to have evaluations anytime soon? I've been here a year and I haven't had an evaluation or an audit.” [Response] “Oh, yeah, yeah, those are coming. Those are coming.” ...A few months would pass and I would send an email, you know, “Hey, I just wanted to check in and see when we were going to be doing lobby audits, if that's something that we still did or if that something that you guys have decided we didn't really need.” You know, oh, you're doing a really great job, Kim. We're trying to get to those, but we haven't been able to schedule those as of yet. It just seemed like it was very disorganized on a lot of levels. My team lead and my manager were considerably younger and in positions that weren't positions that really sought a lot of experience or education.

Offering New Ideas

This code captures examples of when participants spoke up to suggest improvements to work processes or organizational services. Marty, a senior vice president of supply chain, had to educate his resistant business owner and boss on why it was necessary to change the company's supply chain strategy:

So a conversation was, "We've got to put this amount of inventory in a warehouse to service the business and his conversation was, "Why am I going to spend that money?" I don't want to have my assets in the inventory because this inventory is not really sold...The conversation would go, if you want to grow the business, which is the reason you brought me in, you want to do business with these major retailers that you've not business with before, you've got to trust me. This is the way everybody does it. This is the demand in place on their suppliers. These are the things we have to do.

Similarly, Joe worked with his manager to try and persuade the owner of the small business they worked for to try some new marketing strategies in order to grow the business, to no avail:

My boss and I had ideas about how to market a little bit better on the internet. We had ideas about how to change the website. We presented about spending a little bit extra, updating our website, doing things on social media. Some of those things eventually happened. Like the social media happened, but the website never did. I think part of it was just that the business had worked. It was making its chunk of money. Instead of wanting to grow the business, it was just kind of he was okay where it was. It was, "It's worked this way before. We're doing fine. Why should we pour more money into that, not knowing where it will push us? Or when we're kind of okay with the status quo right now?"

Protecting Professional Integrity

This code refers to speaking up to express concerns based in one's professional integrity or personal ethics. Jeremy expressed his concerns about a new leader his current company hired, based on his experience working with the man at a previous employer:

I actually said and did everything I could. I really didn't have any fear. That's probably one of the reasons why me and this new manager didn't exactly see eye to eye. When he was doing stuff that I didn't agree with or that I didn't think was

right, I told him. And I told his boss, too. And his boss was also my old mentor. He was very threatened by me because I had a very good relationship there. And I didn't let a beat go by. My conscious is clear as far as the fact that I said and did everything I could do to let the organization know about the situation they were in."

Mary spoke up for herself and the rest of the sales team when the company CFO made a comment at a company meeting about his belief that the sales team did not deserve the level of compensation they were receiving, despite consistently exceeding their sales goals and their heavy national travel schedule:

It was one of those things where, okay, they want us to work. They want us to sell their products, but when we start making too much money, that was just no good. It was like, "Oh, you guys are making too much money." My thought was if it wasn't for me or people like me that are working that hard and being able to build that relationship, you guys wouldn't have those sales, because one, the product wasn't the greatest. It was okay, but there's other ones that fit just as well, and a lot of it was building relationships. Especially when the CFO made a comment saying, "Sales people don't work hard enough, but they make too much money. They don't deserve to make that much money." And we're like, "Okay, well, if it wasn't for us, you really wouldn't have a job."

Peter was similarly offended when, after working excessive overtime for months, he was denied the bonus he expected—and accused of stealing money, then pressured to pay it back, taking it from his employees' tips if necessary. He ultimately used his exit as voice, refusing to take any action that would imply guilt for himself or his staff related to the missing money:

[My] ultimate reason for leaving was not getting paid properly, not getting the bonus and just the huge mess about missing money and feeling like I was being accused of taking it. I felt like if I went into my own pocket and gave them 600 bucks and my assistant manager throws in 600 bucks too, I felt like that was an admission of guilt. I was very adamant about saying, "I'm not going to pay any money because I didn't take the money." To me, "Here's that money back," that basically says, "Okay, well, Peter took the money, because he's paying it back."

Speaking on Behalf

Refers to speaking up on behalf of coworkers or customers. In some cases the participant asked someone else to speak up for him/herself. As her CEO began neglecting their business during critical merger negotiations, Andie asked the external lawyer handling the merger to speak to her CEO about the merger partner's desire to see the CEO more engaged with the process:

I did communicate that to her [CEO]. But then because I thought "I'm the wrong messenger," I went to our attorney handling the merger and said, "I'm concerned. I think you need to have a discussion with our CEO and you need to let her know that the company we're merging with is onto the fact that there's not a lot of work going on right now. They're beginning to question work ethic. They're beginning to question the desire to go through with this transaction. I think you need to have this conversation with her." I do not know if he ever had that conversation, but he was certainly the right messenger to have it. He was professional counsel. He was being hired. He was looking out for her best interests and trying to secure the most favorable contract for that merger. I felt that he was most definitely the right individual to say, "You know, this is the state of affairs."

Lisa frequently found herself in the position of having to speak up for minorities both in terms of staffing processes at her large advertising firm, as well as the potentially offensive advertising slogans her colleagues sometimes unknowingly created:

I had to stand up for literally the minorities whenever we were talking about strategy, or low-income or minorities. I would have to voice and try to kind of speak on behalf— "Not everybody can relate to whatever it is you're trying to sell right now." But they didn't really care. But it was fine. Yeah, and I felt like I was only there so they could fill out a box. You know, black, female—check. Which is actually true. It's so bad, but I would never have gotten in there if it wasn't for the internship. It was an internship specifically for a minority student.

As the examples detailed above illustrate, there are many reasons that can motivate individuals to speak up. These motivations reflect a genuine concern for the organization, their teams and/or their professions, while often laying under the surface of daily communication until a critical event or observation compelled the individual to speak up. However, as the next section will demonstrate, some participants chose not to

speak up at all, or not to speak up about a particular issue, because of the costs they perceive, or had in fact seen coworkers incur, for speaking up.

Speaking Up: Why Not

Not all participants felt comfortable speaking up, or hesitated to speak up about a particular issue. Reasons for not speaking up reflect a keen awareness of the potential personal costs of doing so. Participants reasons for not speaking up, included: Avoid Putting a Target on My Back, Deferring to Organizational Needs, Network Concerns, and Not My Place.

Avoid Putting a Target on My Back

While Joe felt comfortable speaking up with his boss to company owners regarding new ideas for marketing, he felt speaking up about the differential treatment he saw between male and female coworkers, as well as between staff working in sales (mostly male) and operations (mostly female) would “put a target on my back”:

It made it almost impossible...I wouldn't go talk to them about it because how could I go talk to them and say that they're treating people poorly? Because that would just put a big red flag on my back, a big target on me. Where, it was one of those things that—being on the sales side and being successful there, I think my boss and I, we always felt that we were kind of flying under the radar, just kind of doing our jobs, not to stir the pot, not to kick the hornet's nest or anything like that because we weren't the target of most of their scrutiny or most of their problems. So, let's just keep riding it out because they're treating us okay right now. But like I said, if I would have brought any of those concerns to them, it would have probably looked very poorly on me, put a target on my back, too [like his female workers].

Based on how she had seen a colleague be treated after speaking up, fear of retribution also kept Veronica silent about her problematic manager:

One of my colleagues asked to speak with him about his new way of managing the team, and he tried to explain to him how we did things before and how the

clients were very satisfied with our work in the past, and he was kind of explaining [sic – asking] to him why was he changing things around so drastically, because some of the clients may be upset with some of his new decisions. He listened to my colleague and took his advice into consideration, and then my colleague was fired a week later.

Deferring to Organizational Needs

This code refers to participants' sense that "now is not the right time" to speak up due to actual or perceived organizational factors. For Alison, the unexpected resignation of one leader and the sudden death of another in quick succession, as well as several other issues going on within her department, led to her decision to "lay low" rather than surface her concerns about organizational issues at this particular time:

Our boss...resigned pretty suddenly...so there was a little period of time where there was kind of unrest, I guess. You didn't know what was going to happen, who was going to be our boss. At that time, I guess, maybe my personal feelings are you don't want to ruffle too many feathers. I realized everybody was stressed, so I don't want to put my stress on other people. So, I kind of tried to lay low and figure things out on my own, or ask colleagues, because it was just kind of a tumultuous time, I guess is the best way to put it.

Michelle had chosen to stay silent rather than to ask for more money when the woman for whom she worked as a nanny lost her job, fired her housekeeper, and then expected Michelle to do housework in addition to caring for the woman's one-year old twins. However, once the woman found a new job and would not be working at home as she had previously (and help with some of the duties), Michelle did decide to speak up:

I was willing to go talk to her about maybe getting more money and then she lost her job, so I didn't feel like that was a good opportunity to do it, but when she got a new job, she informed me that she wouldn't be working remotely anymore, so then all of the [housekeeping] responsibilities would be on me. I knew at that point that I needed to go to her and say, you know, either I need more money or this isn't going work out.

Not My Place

This code captures examples of when participants referred to feeling like it was not their job to speak up, either because of their role or the topic at hand. Nicole felt that, as a school psychologist, her position on the hierarchy meant it was not really her place to raise certain issues:

No, I didn't really communicate it, only if it was informal amongst my friends that I worked with. Because of the time that I came in, I don't feel like it was really my place to get involved in it...I just feel like there are certain issues that are made by higher up then it's not directly affecting me. I always feel like you have to know your role or when it's appropriate for you to speak up. And that seemed like a situation that didn't necessarily involve me. So it didn't seem like the right opportunity for me to kind of – maybe cause more dissention.

Zach spoke of how his views on speaking up had evolved from being a “conform zombie” early in his career, to recognizing that his willingness to speak up benefitted not only him, but his organization as well:

I think when I first entered my field, I thought that you pretty much had to be a conform zombie. You couldn't be yourself. I've learned that it's good to be different, to have different ideas and to not be ashamed of perhaps your work style... I think I'm starting to become more willing to butt heads in a professional manner, knowing that differing opinions are actually good. If everyone had the same opinion or was afraid to speak up, an organization wouldn't change. An organization, I think, is doomed if they don't change and adapt.

As these codes illustrate, members who chose not speak up privileged existing organizational structures and power dynamics as the primary drivers of their choice to keep silent. As highlighted in the next section, those who chose to speak up often did in fact experience those power dynamics, as managers leaders and managers often used their power to silence or otherwise discipline expressions of employee voice.

Speaking Up – Response

As Joe and Veronica's comments above illustrate noted, observing how others attempts at speaking up were received can have a silencing effect. Participants in this

study who chose to speak up noted three main types of responses from the organization: Being Silenced, Nothing We Can Do and Told Area of Concern is Not Important.

Being Silenced

This code captures examples of speaking up and receiving silence, or being silenced through the response received. Chloe sensed that her low position in the organization led to the silencing responses she received when on multiple occasions she raised questions and concerns about client contracts:

No one valued what I had to say because I was [low] on the totem pole. If they had listened and if they had valued what I had to say, a lot could have been avoided. You just can't write employees off. That would be the biggest thing. Don't write off your employees, even if you think what they're saying sounds weird or nuts or crazy and that you could never believe that someone else could do something like that. Listen to it. At least do a little thinking on it, how best to solve after a couple of questioning and fact finding [conversations]. If you start doing some thinking and you keep looking, then you could help really find out what's going on. They didn't do that. They didn't really think.

Alyssa tried on numerous times to establish friendships with her teammates, only to be rebuffed every time. Additionally, the one coworker whom Alyssa thought could become a friend violated her confidence by telling HR about Alyssa's frustration that her boss had chosen not to staff her on a new project because Alyssa was a new mother:

I got a new job because the old one sucked. The old one wasn't going to work for me on so many different levels and in so many different ways. It goes back to the person who went and tattled on me for talking about my boss not giving me the job because I was pregnant and didn't want to give those jobs to a new mom. It's all of it. It's from my team not making me feel included to—there's research that shows if you don't have a work friend within 90 days of starting a job—85% of those people find a new job within a year. And in my group, I didn't have a work friend within 90 days. You know what? I found a new job. It's just those type of things where I can't put my finger on one thing that it was. It was multiple things. [Even] if I hadn't had the baby, I probably wouldn't still be there. I probably would have taken a different type of job than I have now, but I would have a different job.

Nothing We Can Do

This code captures examples of participants being explicitly told “there is nothing that can be done” to address the area of concern. Mary tried to speak to leaders in the company about problems she was experiencing with her new manager, only to be told they could not help her because she no longer reported to them:

There were quite a few people that were on my level that kind of felt the same way. I think they were a little bit better off because a couple of them were in Buffalo, and they worked with her. So she would be able to say that, “Yes, they’re in the office and they go there because she sees them every day.” Where if it’s me and three other people, she couldn’t see us in the office, so she couldn’t control that. She didn’t know what we were doing. Even though everything that we did was put in a system. Everything required was done. I did speak with some of my previous managers that did see it, and they said, “There’s nothing we can do, because we’re not your manager anymore, but you just do as she says. I did speak once to the president of the company, and he just said, “Well, just do what she says that you need to do.

Similarly, Veronica tried to speak up to her company’s owners about the problematic leadership style of her new manager, only to be told that she needed to make the best of the situation:

We complained to them [company leaders], and they did hear our complaints, but they said they needed someone to manage us as soon as possible, since our old boss just up and quit. They said they were still working on trying to find someone suitable for the next year coming up and that we would just have to try to work with him in the time being, because he was the only one that was certified for that position. [i.e., had an advanced degree]. It was disappointing, but...I kind of understood their point, and I tried to stick it out as long as I could.

Told Area of Concern is Not Important

This code refers to receiving the implied or explicit message that the topic involved is not important to the recipient and/or the organization. Chris shared his ideas for improving the features of the products he was designing, only to be told that the product was good enough as it was, given the company’s top status in the industry.

Additionally, he noticed a connection between this feedback and the lack of advancement opportunities for career development for technical staff, another area of concern for Chris:

I communicated that during my performance reviews, that, “Hey, we should do a better job of these things, we need to make sure that we have these safeguards in place, better testing, etcetera, this obviously doesn’t look good for us because we actually failed on this deliverable.” What was communicated to me in this review was, “Yes, that’s true, but don’t worry about it” because to some extent the technology that we’re working on, we had somewhat of a monopoly on, so the motto was, “Where else are they going to go?”...There was no need to get better...There were other people in senior leadership that held that same sort of mantra for a really long time.

I think that led also fed into that lack of advancement [and] appreciation for losing technical talent, because from a business standpoint, they felt they had somewhat of a monopoly on the technology, so they had no need to promote technical retention, because they felt they could always just bring other people in and they would always have customers coming in to buy their products.

Sam was surprised when the company owner made excuses for the issues Sam reported to him as the owner had asked Sam to do:

I would just let him [company owner] know what’s going on, he asked that of me...He goes, “I’m sticking you in this office because I want you to be able to tell me what’s going on because I want to know how we can improve this company and make it better.” So, I took that personally. I was like, “Okay, he told me to do this, so I’m going to tell him.” Whether he took it or not is another thing. I would tell him, sometimes like, “Oh yeah, right now it’s not the best. This is what’s going on.” He’s like, “Yeah. Well, that’s just how they are. It’ll blow over.” It was more of like “It’ll blow over,” was the response that I got most of the time, and so nothing really happened until it actually had to happen.

Conclusion

The findings detailed in this chapter illustrate the active, thoughtful, and effortful responses of employees make to engage organizational leadership in addressing issues they experience as personally problematic, as well as potentially risky for the other members and the organization as a whole. These findings challenge the popular notion

that individuals addressing voice are simply “negative” or “jaded.” The response of leadership to expressions of voice plays a powerful role in the exit-related sensemaking process as it sends a clear signal about who is in charge (managers and leaders) and what is expected of members (just do your job, do not challenge the system). With a high level sense of employees’ sensemaking processes, the next several chapters will detail member sensemaking related to the most common topical themes that emerged from their narratives.

Chapter 5 will discuss the macro-level organizational system (culture, policies, communication practices); Chapter 6 will detail sensemaking related to organizational leaders; Chapter 7 will detail sensemaking related to managers (the individual responsible for providing day-to-day member instruction and oversight); Chapter 8 will review sensemaking related to daily interactions with and observations of, coworkers; Chapter 9 will discuss members daily work, including the types of micro to macro-level changes members experienced and the meaning assigned they assigned to the changes and the way they were implemented.

Chapter 5: The Selfish System

“What is a single selfish gene trying to do? It is trying to get more numerous in the gene pool. Basically it does this by helping to program the bodies in which it finds itself to survive and to reproduce... 'it' is a distributed agency, existing in many different individuals at once... a gene might be able to assist replicas of itself that are sitting in other bodies. If so, this would appear as individual altruism but it would be brought about by gene selfishness.”

*-- Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 1976, p. 88*

The 60 people interviewed for this project represent a variety of industries job levels, job tenures and roles. Despite these differences, findings of this study highlighted a range of similarities facing members of today’s paid workforce. The structures and culture of any organization are interdependent and always evolving, requiring members to expend considerable energy navigating a complex maze of policies and relationships, while being accountable for meeting the organizational expectations placed on them. Based on the concept of the selfish gene outlined by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins (1976) in his book, *The Selfish Gene*, the Selfish System conceptualizes the organizational systems described by participants in this study—one that demands assimilation to the existing culture, using its structures to reinforce the rules for survival among members and to discipline any variance. The goal of the Selfish System then is to ensure the continued life of the existing system, while blending in with existing relationships (Gardner & Welch, 2011) and accepting that not all organisms (i.e., members) it inhabits will survive.

This process can be seen in the narratives analyzed in this study. Despite their best efforts to use their knowledge, skills and motivation to advance the organization, participants shared their gradual realization, constructed through sensemaking, that what their organizations valued most was productivity within the confines of organizational predictability. The Selfish System demanded participants focused on doing what they

were told, staying silent and sacrificing their initiative in favor of “good enough” work patterns and products that ensured the accepted level and type of organizational productivity. Codes in this set illustrate these macro-level complexities through a set of five super-axial codes, summarized here and then detailed in an additional four chapters), including: *Leadership, Management, Coworkers, and Work & Change*. This chapter explores the specific macro-level complexities of the Selfish System.

DEFINING THE SELFISH SYSTEM

The Selfish System, inspired by Dawkins’ concept of the selfish gene (1976), is a term that reflects the sum total of the myriad of pressures placed upon organizational members. From bureaucracies that are so intense as to be stifling, to conversely, an absence of structures designed to support system members. Rita, a marketing specialist for a small local credit union, quickly realized that her employer had a limited definition of paid “work,” and expected her to go to community outreach and networking events without being paid for these job-related networking functions. Rita perceived this expectation as a form of control and a signal of the organization’s lack of trust in her. She experienced multiple examples of this lack of trust, which she also viewed as questioning her professionalism. This, in turn, led her to question the professionalism of the organization:

I had to fill out this stupid little time card each Monday. We got paid bi-weekly. I had joined my boss at a ribbon cutting, and it was like 8:30 in the morning. So on my time card, I put 8:30, because I was working. And she said something to the effect, “Oh, we can’t pay you for that.” Like, “That’s not working.” She can do that because she’s on salary. I don’t remember what was exactly said, but she just said, “Oh, why don’t you just leave a few minutes early today or something and just not put it on there.” That was strange.

Then I went to a women’s group during the lunch hour, and that’s work. It’s a networking event, and you’re representing work, and I put that down on my time card and she said, “Oh, we can’t pay you for that.” Don—who’s the CEO—said,

“We’re not going to pay you for that hour.” And I’m like—“Oh.” Then the same situation happened where I was going to go to a good morning event through the Chamber [of Commerce]. They’re at 7:00 a.m., and I was like, “Okay, I’ll go and then leave early.” “Oh no, no, no. We won’t pay you for that.” I’m shocked—then I’m not going. Obviously I was not very motivated to go to any networking events whatsoever, and so I didn’t...

There were some situations like those that were just so backward thinking that are definitely examples of, “You’ve got to be kidding me, that’s the way you are going to operate? You’re not going to encourage the marketing person to go out and do anything? Are you kidding?” There definitely wasn’t flexibility, and that’s what the killer was, that’s what got to me.

In other instances, an organization refused to change, even after it suffered serious consequences as a result of its problematic—and selfish—norms and policies. Samantha, a young consultant, saw several of her female colleagues struggle with lack of flexibility around maternity leave and related needs for new mothers, part of broader gender dynamic issues present within the company, a consulting firm—ironically—with service offerings focused on helping clients improve organizational quality and efficiency:

There were also things like when Alyssa and Gabriella were expecting—I don’t know. I’m trying to articulate this in a way that actually makes sense. I felt like the way people articulated their states were just that. As a state. That they were in a state of pregnancy and that would somehow inhibit them from doing things. Like with Alyssa, she wanted to come over to the consulting team. Her manager said that, given her condition, this probably wasn’t the best time. It’s like, what condition? This wasn’t a condition.

The other girl who I had interviewed with, Elizabeth—apparently she had asked for part-time hours for the first few months after coming back from maternity leave and they said no. For such a small, supposedly practical company, it’s just an interesting choice. Now she works consulting. They pay her as a private contract job on the side, but no one knows about it. They keep it really secret because they were also being sued at the time by a woman for gender bias... And then they would make comments to me, like, “Don’t you go and get pregnant now, Samantha.” And I’d be like, “Okay.” I don’t know. I just felt like I was handicapped because of my age or my gender or whatever it was.

Alyssa’s comments reflect her early stages of sensemaking related to making sense

of the selfish system. Alyssa was puzzled by why the organization chose not to offer reasonable accommodations for pregnant and parenting female employees, while revealing how awareness of the undiscussable consequences of the organization's selfish gene (i.e., the gender discrimination lawsuit). This axial code includes examples detailing the sensemaking efforts and daily logistical challenges participants faced in navigating the complexities of the Selfish System, including: *Creating Expectations*, *Experiencing Inflexibility*, and *Recognizing How Structures Serves the Organization*.

Creating Expectations

Participants' reflected on a variety of work-related expectations created by organizational structure, including factors such as physical co-location, work-related travel and performance evaluation criteria. Rebecca, a director for a large telecommunication firm shared the boundary-setting struggles she faced when she first began working with virtual teams:

Physically, it's draining because where you used to [when working with co-located colleagues] get up and walk around— and you'd actually have five minutes between meetings because everybody knew that you had to walk from one physical location to another. That was probably the first initial thing that I noticed about my own health, was things like—I know this is gross— but holding going to the bathroom for an hour because you didn't want to get up from a conference call and miss something. You've got back to back bookings and not knowing how to manage that. Eventually, I was like, "Sorry I'm going to be ten minutes late to your meeting." But especially when you're young in your career, you can't do things like that.

Rebecca continued, sharing the additional challenge of often being physically disembedded from her work:

Physically, I noticed not getting up. It's not just working from home. A lot of people are in the building, sitting cube by cube and they're all on conference calls all day long, so that was awkward. You're literally in a room with hundreds of

people, but you're not talking to anybody that's with you. Mobile technology allows you to get out and move around, but that's even more awkward sometimes because you're in a physical space that's not the mental space you're in. I might be at the grocery store and have my cell phone in my pocket. Physically, I'm in a place that's telling me, "You need to be making purchasing decisions. You need to socialize with the cashier." But mentally, I'm on a conference call where they're talking about budgets and I should be paying attention to percentages. It's just strange. That's a lot of mental stress, too.

Additionally, participants commented about the conflicting expectations placed upon them by various organizational structures. Paul, a bank auditor, was disappointed that he could not participate in his company's annual day of community service due to his work-related travel schedule. He also rejected the implicit pressure he felt to spend his weekends completing administrative work he did not have time to do at his client site during the week:

Their website and all the information would say, we want you [to volunteer], they were active with the Community Day, which I was never able to participate in because I was either travelling or I had just come back from a trip and I wasn't about to go in and do something outside of the office when I had administrative work to complete...because you only got minimal time. There were a lot of people spending way too much time on the weekends working and I just flat out, at my age and at this point in my career, I want to spend time—weekends are short enough and I've got an aged father that I was taking care of and whatnot. I just said, "I am not working on the weekend." That's where I just said, "There will be work-life balance and, that's just the way it's going to be."

Ivy, a senior manager for a large consulting firm, noticed how the firm failed at a systems level to align their espoused and perceived values:

There's some things that really work at Big Time Consulting. Some people really care and take the time. I think taking a more holistic look at how the partnership works and what success measures they put in place to promote the behaviors they want to promote. I think that's a big piece of it, the way that they promote behaviors and what behaviors are valued...They need to coach people on how to be better leaders. Because they don't—they just expect people to know how to do it. It's something that you have to learn and see good examples. They don't have that today. It's kind of a weird—I mean, [I can say] as a leadership consultant

now myself, their leadership is broken. If they can work on that and how they set up behaviors for people to be successful, it would be a different place.

Experiencing Inflexibility

This code reflects participants' hardships—workplace and personal—experienced as a result of inflexible policies instituted from various sources, including the team, organizational, and/or external levels. Sue realized she would need to quit her job to return to her school for a Master's degree because the hospital where she worked did not offer reduced hours for full-time employees attending college classes, nor any type of tuition reimbursement. Maggie, a massage therapist was working full shifts without breaks because of the lean staff her employer maintained.

On top of the extensive state regulations for service types and deadlines for planning and delivering health-related special education services, Anne often had to spend an extensive amount of time—while working under state regulations and deadlines—to help families find local healthcare providers covered by the family's insurance and ultimately affordable for the family:

When the families came to our program, our evaluations and service coordination were all free of charge. The agency would charge their insurance to try and get reimbursements for services and support. But if they were declined or denied, the families would never be charged for what I did or for what the evaluators within our agency did. The only time it would incur a cost was if they were getting an ongoing provider to work there. So a lot of the confusion that we would end up having is—okay, we have a private insurance family that is, for example, 50% on the sliding fee scale or 100% on the sliding fee scale, meaning they were going to have to pay the full rate for any therapy.

It could have been as little as \$15 for one week of therapy for one family, and as much as \$150 for another family to have that service. It could become very challenging in trying to figure out what worked best for the family as far as – really how much support they need and then how much financially can they afford and which providers are available right now that takes that family's insurance company. So sometimes I found a provider that was available, but they weren't in network for the plan.

Recognizing the Structure Serves the Organization

This code reflects participants coming to the realization that, in the words of one participant, “what they want to happen will happen.” The incidents and realizations captured here illustrate how organizational managers work together to maintain organizational stability, despite the costs this stability might generate for the organization or its members. Manager and leaders focus on following rules and enforcing norms, leaving workers to navigate their way within the often conflicting expectations of the system.

John, the only African American worker at the factory where he worked, perceived that management was allowing his peer, Jeff, to not provide John the training he needed, because Jeff and the supervisors—all White—had worked together for a number of years and were friends outside of work. The issue came to a head when Jeff was not present for John’s performance review:

Dave [plant operations supervisor] said, “Well, I did get some input from Jeff.” I said, “Well how can you get some input from Jeff and he hasn’t said one word to me, good or bad, no documentation or anything, training or anything, in a year? So how can you do an evaluation based on what he said? He hasn’t said anything to me. He hasn’t trained me.” So we had a discussion about it. I said, “Jeff needs to be doing my evaluation because you are not directly supervising me.” And that’s it. Then I’m kind of concerned about Jeff because he hasn’t given me any instruction, good or bad, or he hasn’t said a word to me in a year...Nothing was done about it. At that time, I didn’t want to bring up the race word or anything like that. I was trying hard. Actually I never did bring it up. But I said, “You know, this is a bunch of crap.”

I’ve been a supervisor before. There’s no way you can do an evaluation without supervising me...I think they ran things a little different. I believe it stopped at Dave. He wasn’t telling Bruce [plant manager] anything that was going on. Dave was a really nice guy. I liked Dave. But he was a part of the good ole boys – they were all buddies. They used to work in the same place. Jeff would tell Dave, “I ain’t doing that shit [training John]. I ain’t doing that. I’m not going to do it.” And several things that Bruce had told Jeff to do, Dave covered for him when he wouldn’t do it...It got to the point where I got tired – it wasn’t worth my time anymore. I ended up deciding that “Well, it’s probably time to go.”

Alison, a school psychologist, stopped sharing her suggestions and concerns once she realized management would not commit to making any real change based on staff input:

I guess in the end, it worked out. I understood different viewpoints. But I guess, at this school in particular, they are just very—I don't want to say like a dictatorship, but usually what the administration wants, the administration gets. I had multiple issues that year of this same kind of thing occurring. I think at that point, I continued to do my best and say what I thought should happen. But I guess as situations continued to happen, I kind of realized that no matter what I say, they're probably going to do what they want anyway. From an ethical standpoint, I'm going to voice my concerns and say what I think should happen. But ultimately, I kind of always knew that it didn't really matter what I said or how well I might have argued my point. What they wanted to happen would happen.

Rick, an accountant, realized how his geographically dispersed, chronically understaffed organization created a paradigmatic narrative (Linde, 2001) that allowed the firm to extract more productivity from—and silence—its members:

I think it's such a hierarchical goal organization that I don't think there was that intention from immediate managers and senior auditors. The people who were making decisions, they were sitting at desks in Houston and New York making certain decisions on the amount of people that could be working there, and so when you are looking at the partner, say in Boston, they try to make the best of what they have and everything, but if they're understaffed, they're understaffed. And if you say, "Hey, we're understaffed," then you're going to look like you are not working hard enough, you know? I don't think intentionally it was like people's goal to do that, but I think it's just the nature of how the company is structured.

Navigating Culture & Structure

While dealing with the often conflicting expectations and inflexibility characteristic of the Selfish System, individuals must also successfully navigate the Selfish System on a daily basis. This effort—and the related frustration that often accompanies them—can be very time intense and educational for members. The implicit

messages members receive from the organization leads members to begin questioning the alignment between the organization's formal mission and the values and tasks the organization is actually prioritizing. The issues highlighted in these codes signal the beginning of the organizational exit decision-making process, given that they pull members' attention away from—and even conflict with—the organization's stated mission and members' ability to focus on fulfilling their core job responsibilities.

Ron, a military veteran, compared the type of supervision he received as a third-party contracted chemical operations technician for a global technology manufacturer to his time in the military:

At Oxygen Enterprises [OE], you basically would do all the signatures and everything, but you would turn in all those sheets...if at any point any signature was missing—even if it was your partner's signature—you got lectured on it. You have a very, very paperwork based structure versus the military, who does a lot of paperwork on their own, but in my particular section of [military] work, being on the infantry side of the house, somebody either did it for you, or they leave you alone because you're trying to master more technical things.... That's just very different at OE. It got to a point where it did not matter what you did, if your signature wasn't on a piece of paper, or if we stepped anywhere out of line, they would block you off, like you were done. It kind of also created a bigger culture of fear than the military, which is kind of ironic.

Ron's experience points out how organizational structure and processes create a culture that that signals to members that the organization is distancing itself from members and their actual work/productivity. Codes in this set include: Dealing with Insufficient Professional Resources, Dealing with uninformed decision-making, Dealing with Insufficient Processes, Dealing with Problematic Processes, Managing Organizational Face, Navigating Conflicting Organizational Goals and Values, Navigating Insider-Outsider Structure, and Playing the Game.

Dealing with Insufficient Professional Resources

This code refers to instances where the organization failed to provide all of the resources necessary for members to fulfill their profession's role within the organization. For Ryan, a marketing assistant, this took the form of being told his organization did not have the funds to pay for a software upgrade the organization itself was requiring:

We got an email sent down to everyone who had the software on their computer, some IT thing that the version that we had was not approved on our computers and we needed to get the up to date most current version. We all kind of looked around, like, 'Okay that's fine, but we have no money to purchase the new version because you've cut all of our budget.' It's kind of like, "What do you want us to do? Are you going to give us a free pass and let us keep the old version? Or are you going to give us the money to buy the new one?" That was a situation that we ran into where some of those resources they were trying to take away and deny from us, we really needed them to kind of keep doing our work.

What they eventually did was they just okayed the version that we currently had. I know in our marketing department, we had some money set aside from different advertising contracts that we had, so we were able to buy the new version. But I know some other organizations, they weren't able to.

Similarly, Alisa a grade school teacher, spoke of the time she and other teachers had to spend locating their own resources for teaching students performing below grade level:

In one class, we have so many different levels and abilities. You have kids that are on grade level that can read on their grade level. Maybe one or two that read above, but then you have a significant number of kids that are underneath grade level sometimes they might be in third grade, but they're reading on a first grade level. And so the teaching materials that the district will give us were on third grade level, so it was up to us to go and find materials so that we could teach, that we could use to teach the kids that were not on grade level, to try to get them up to grade level. One way that we did cooperate with each other is that we shared materials that we found that would be appropriate for each individual student's reading ability, as well as creating materials. If we weren't able to find things would work for whatever instructional path that we were supposed to teach them.

Jack, a chef, signaled the same type of concerns regarding the restaurant owner's lack of willingness to install much-needed upgrades to his restaurant's kitchen equipment which would malfunction during busy times, crating chaos for Jack and his kitchen team:

I knew the owner had tried to maintain the restaurant as best he could, but I knew at the same time he was deflecting a lot of the issues with the kitchen that I'm sure he was aware of, and that I stressed and that the head chef had stressed to him. I put him at fault, and I felt like he was overlooking renovations because it might delay—they might have to close the restaurant to get it done. That was a frustration of mine. It really made me feel like he was not giving us proper credit that we deserved, because we were continually busy and we were always kind of striving for next month, meeting that expectation, but at the same time, he wasn't meeting our expectations.

Chris, a software engineer, shared how the strength of his team—and the active involvement of his team lead—helped them cope with the challenges of decreasing team size:

The second department I worked in, I think things went well, and I think it was reflected within the performance reviews. The team sizes tended to shrink the longer I stayed at MobileTech. It just happened to be that way. I don't know if there's a correlation or a reason behind it, but the second department I was in, I was only in a four-person team. And I think part of the reason why things went well then is that was the first time I was actually on a team with a team lead that actually was more technical and got more involved with the actual development processes [rather than just managing].

Dealing with Insufficient Processes

This code refers to examples of challenges faced by members working in organizations that did not have processes in place to adequately support the current functions of the organizations. Joe, a sales assistant for a small business owned by a father and son, shared the struggles he faced in discerning the chain of command and deciding whose instructions he should follow:

It was such a small company, but it still seemed to be too many bosses. There were the two owners that both thought—when the father was there, he would basically control ideas. But you still had the son who was away sending emails and trying to be part of the company every once in a while when something would

come up. So, that was tough to always discern who was the one you really needed to report to? Who was the one you really needed to listen to? Sometimes they were varying on ideas and strategies.

And on top of that, we had another person who was in charge of our operations team. She was a manager, a lot of the decisions from the father, who was the owner, went through her. And then there was also the sales manager who was my friend. So, a lot of decisions would go through him and the son. It was almost like there were four bosses in an office of ten people. It was just a lot of trying to negotiate and trying to filter through who to talk to for certain problems, whose toes not to step on. Just things like that that were hard to deal with because of the structure of the company and too many people trying to make decisions.

Andrew, a restaurant catering assistant, was confounded when he was offered two different positions when he turned in his two-week notice. This offer, although flattering to him, reflected the chaotic processes that contributed to his decision to leave the organization in the first place:

I was offered a job as a prep cook and as an office manager assistant and really just decided this restaurant doesn't run smoothly and these people aren't pulling their weight and I don't want to be a part of it anymore. I don't want to try and reclaim the success that was here [when I first started], when I couldn't quite find value in it because, at that point, the people in the restaurant were not getting paid and everybody was always aggravated. Like every single day, you didn't know what you were going to get when you walked into work. It's just frustrating and I decided that I didn't want to be a part of that. I put my two weeks in because...I felt like there were other places that worked better and that this was not a good fit.

Dealing with Problematic Staffing Processes

This code refers to situations where staffing decisions were made based on criteria based on who was the best person for the job. Reasons here include factors such as nepotism, seniority and the convenience of management. These factors, perceived to be unrelated to merit or efficiency, were a clear source of frustration and concern for participants. Lisa, an account planner for a large advertising firm, was frustrated by the criteria used to staff projects and advance careers:

It's like nepotism. It's a good old boys club. They did not, as a company, value efficiency or innovation or entrepreneurship—an entrepreneurial attitude. That was not valued. And that's what I'm all about. Creating something new, creating something better. Getting things done. But, like I said, they're just much more about who do you know, do you have the right to speak, who you're related to, how did you get here.

Nicole saw problems in the way seniority was used for placing school psychologists at schools across her school district:

When you're newer coming in, you're assigned the really—I won't say awful, but you get the leftovers. You get assigned to schools that people don't want to be at. And so that doesn't necessarily make for the best first year if you're given all the leftovers and schools with a lot of issues and no one wants to work at. I think having a little bit more balance in how the positions are handed out—that was probably the big thing...Because then people get burned out. You don't want people to get burned out when they first start because they have all the difficult placements.

Kim, a receptionist, saw her team lead make staffing decisions based on what was most convenient for herself, while also seeking to avoid complaints or conflicts from outspoken team members. The situation caused Kim extra work and delayed breaks:

Even the floaters, they felt like they weren't being used to their full potential and people weren't getting breaks and things that they might need because the manager or lead was afraid to schedule them [floater] for more than what would be a typical schedule for them because they didn't want to put someone in a position where they felt like they were being asked to do more than they would normally do. It's really weird. It doesn't always make any sense.

It was frustrating. Sometimes being in a busier lobby, it's hard to just get up and put up a sign that says, I'll be back in five minutes, please wait. It kind of makes you feel insecure to put the sign up knowing that some of your stuff is just left there. I mean, yes, we might've had drawers to put it in, but it kind of took more of an effort to lock things up and make sure your computer was locked up, so that you didn't just leave it open for someone to look at. If you needed to run to the bathroom and you weren't getting a break, if you were in a busy lobby, it's a little more inconvenient and sometimes hard to find a time to get to do that depending on how heavy your traffic is that day.

Dealing with Uninformed Decision-Making

This code illustrates the limits of managerialism, underscoring what impact decision-making made without an appropriate level of understanding has on both people and organizational outcomes. Anne, a special education coordinator, shared that while she felt her direct supervisors understood the challenges faced by school staff and families trying to provide special education services for students, she felt that the State legislators passing laws that governed these programs lacked the context necessary to understand the impact of the regulations they were passing:

It's kind of like when people talk about being a classroom teacher. There's people making policies for classroom teachers that have never been in a classroom—similar situation, or similar complaint I would say. The director of the program and my supervisors here in Mickleson County, they understand what it's like being in the homes and doing this. But they're getting information from the state level—and then they're having to pass it along to us. That's the part, if anything, that I would complain about is – people are passing down new policy down the line. Honestly, if you're not in the family's home, and seeing how that affects them – and going through one family's start of the program, being in the program and leaving the program and seeing what it takes to get support set up for them, to get an evaluation done—that would be the complaint that I would have. They [state] could make things harder than it has to be sometimes, as opposed to the people that I was working directly with.

Rick's experience as an auditor for a large accounting firm, reflected the same concern for how physically-removed decision-makers lacking a contextual understanding impacted decisions-making and its outcomes for teams on the ground:

I think it's such a hierarchical organization that I don't think there was that attention from immediate managers and senior auditors. The people who were making decisions, they were sitting at desks in Houston and New York making certain decisions on the amount of people that could be working there, and so, I mean, when you are looking at the partner, say in Boston, they try to make the best of what they have and everything, but if they're understaffed, they're understaffed. And if you say, "Hey, we're understaffed," then you're going to look like you are not working hard enough, you know? I mean, I don't think intentionally it was like people's goal to do that, but I think it's just the nature of how the company's structured.

Furthermore, Jacob a finance manager explained his concerns regarding the impending impact of decision-makers' lack of contextual awareness and lack of concern about organizational outcomes:

There was a new Chief Operating Officer hired from Brightstar Consulting. And he definitely did not have a respect for what was going on [at our site] —or an understanding of how much work was done at the Houston office. And they didn't like the fact that they were spending—I think it was \$12 million on the budget for the Houston office, and decided they were going to do something about it. Even though the work wasn't going down—in fact, it was expanding. We had started out with less than 100 people. When I left there, there were 250. They kept starting new funds that several of them we didn't have any experience in - real estate investment funds, hedge funds and energy funds that we just didn't have any technical experience in. It just got harder and harder.

Managing Organizational Face

This code refers to instances where participants had to represent, explain and/or justify organizational decisions and policies to clients or other external stakeholders. In addition to dealing with anger of customers, participants themselves had to process their own disappointment in the organization for its decision making and failure to meet clients' needs. Kelly, a state welfare benefits coordinator, shared the challenges she faced trying to help state residents access welfare benefits and related resources in a largely rural state with few programs for low income residents. Additionally, due to liability concerns, the agency she worked for prohibited her from giving clients direct financial advice:

People are always coming in and asking questions like “How do we do this, how do we do that?,” and we're like, “We can't tell you what to do. We can't give financial advice. We can't help people find jobs.” We're not allowed to do that because any advice that we give comes back on the agency, the agency is liable. We give somebody investment advice that turns out bad, the agency can be sued and so it's hard because we would love to give people advice, but, “Well, I can't tell you what to do, but if I were in your situation.”

I've had to tell clients—it's an income-based system and youth-based economy. It doesn't function the way that people need it to and it doesn't function the way that people want it to, but we just have to do the best we can with the system that we have and if there's any way that we can find to help you, we will find it.

Andie, chief marketing officer for a small health foods company explained the personal disappointment she felt when her company was not able to supply enough products to keep their clients' shelves stocked:

I mean, having this thing with Harvest Foods [upscale grocery store] where there's a demand for your protein shake and you are out of stock and you don't have enough money to get it back in stock right away. In that same 2008, I would say even in 2009, where that was absolutely an issue...[It felt] like a bit of a failure. That you've worked so hard to get to this point, but now you're failing to meet those obligations. You're failing to deliver on that promise. I always go by the premise of under-promise and over-deliver. And we did quite the opposite. We really over-promised and under-delivered.

Andrew, a catering assistant, spoke of the times he had to handle irate customers when the food they ordered did not arrive on time due to poorly handled leadership and process changes at the restaurant:

Me and Mary were the two, like we were the faces of it. I'd show up and when it was late, they'd come and find me and be like, "Hey, our food was supposed to be here two minutes ago, where is it? Go downstairs and tell Percy [restaurant owner] we need our food now." It came down on me and I got yelled at a few times for not having food or bringing the wrong food and stuff like that, which was stressful and it's just aggravating to know, like, hey, I can handle my job and I can get these things here successfully, but when it's this disorganized, if these don't work out and it doesn't work smoothly, I mean, I have to not necessarily take the responsibility for it, but I'm the face that accepts the responsibility. It wasn't fun to have 55-year-old executives yelling at me in the hallway because their food isn't there on time. That was stressful and that got passed down.

Navigating Conflicting Organizational Values and Goals

This code refers to examples where participants had to sort through the realization that the organization they worked for had different even selfish, motives for some of its

decisions and actions. Examples here illustrate the confusion and eventual shifting and/or hardening of the participants' attitudes toward the organization and its practices. Alison, a school psychologist began to feel that the organization did not adhere to its espoused values, or her own professional values:

The reason that I had gotten into the job was to help kids be more successful at school, to be successful academically, behaviorally, emotionally. There were sometimes with that, even though I have the skills to do that, that I think I bring a lot to the table, some of the, I guess more often than not, the organizational issues and the systems issues and the way that psychologist's work was viewed, didn't allow me to get towards that goal that I got into the job in the first place.

I felt like, ultimately, at the end of the day, when I'd got done with my job and I was driving home in my car, I was like, "What did I accomplish today that helped a student?" And sometimes there were days where I couldn't think of anything because all I had done was argue with an administrator or deal with a disgruntled parent or try to give strategies that no one listened to. I think at the end of the day, the philosophical differences, just the—the reason that I got into the job was not happening, if that makes any sense.

Paul, a bank auditor, stated his frustration with how his firm would knowingly budget less people for a project than would be necessary to complete the project:

To be fair, the manager sometimes [set the project budget]. Other times, it was the clients, the partner in charge of that client. That was one of the things that was frustrating about this role was that unless you were fully in the weeds and were able to establish the budget and even if you did, you knew—I had conversations with my associate in my office who had been there longer, even though you knew it was going to take longer than was budgeted, you had to budget it in order to win the business because it's a very competitive business—so it was like, what's the point then? You know, because if you are going to budget, say three people for two full days, and you know it's going to take longer because you might need a fourth person, well, that fourth person that you're sucking up—basically the company is incurring all those expenses and it's not doable for the client. So, I don't know. It just was a little frustrating from that perspective.

Darren was willing to give his company the benefit of the doubt for its failure to address a series of ongoing issues between Darren, his subordinate and his boss

(including the potential existence of an inappropriate relationship between his subordinate and boss), but that changed once Human Resources got involved:

Up to that time, I realize my team leader was doing his thing. My direct report was doing her thing, and I couldn't necessarily control that. I was trying to weigh my options, in terms of okay, how do I work through this with the vice president? How do I work through this within the larger context of the company?...I mean, the company is multi-national, they're global. They build some good products. I was looking for ways to stick around, still enjoy what I was doing, but not under this team lead.

But things changed for me when the HR director got involved, because that told me that the company didn't really support me, and that it was really kind of a political game, seeing that my team lead, he was able to essentially beat me to the punch. He went to HR first with some accusations which, you know, I guess maybe because of his friendship with HR, I don't know, but painted me in a bad light and made it difficult for me to get a fair shake. Even though the VP went to bat for me, I think that was more of the vice president and his experience, rather than the company coming through and realizing, oh, we may have made a mistake in how we treated this guy. I guess that stands out as probably the instance where the company just really failed me or let me down.

Navigating Insider-Outsider Structure

This code refers to examples of when participants had to navigate the insider-outsider that existed within an organization, often created explicitly by how the organization had chosen to structure itself, or evolved more organically as a result of how an individual or his role was viewed by other members. Sometimes there is a swift change in organizational structure, while in other instances differences between employee groups were a long-standing, well-known, largely accepted factor in organizational life. Peter was hired to manage a music venue by a company whose main business was running a chain of Hooters-inspired restaurants:

Well, Hot Babes is based upon—they call it a breastaurant, and I think it's just such a chauvinistic—I mean, I had to go pick up paychecks at the Hot Babes on 10th Street, and I just felt weird walking in there. It's just such a, I don't know, maybe I'm just a feminist in a previous life, but it's so objectified and it's so

wrong. I'm just not the dude that would go to a Hooter's or a Hot Babes. I think I've been to like one strip club in my life. I just felt like dirty being in there.

And then you've got Scotty's. It's a more rough and tough side of town, a little bit more rock 'n roll. And it was a bar. It was a bar with a venue, and the venue aspect of it was clear difference between what they were doing—they know nothing about music, bands, venues, the ins and outs of that side of the music industry. It's a very complicated industry that you've got to know what you're doing. You can't just put a stage up and think that people are going to show up, like a restaurant where girls are walking around in Hot Babes [outfits]. [Here] they're doing an east side music venue in Boston that could hold 1,000 people. It's just night and day.

Luke, a contracted building maintenance engineer, saw how union electricians on site were treated much differently than he was, as a third-party contracted “service” employee:

There were other employees there that were city employees that worked in another union [on site] and it was a union dedicated to that field [building engineering], which provided more safety because it wasn't a union for service employees. It was a union for engineering, maintenance, and it was a more respected union, if you will, more dedicated to the field of maintenance and engineering. I worked for a [subcontracted] company. You became a service employee union member and the employees for the city municipality, the ones who actually worked with electricity were electricians, were very qualified, educated in that field, whereas I did light electrical and was not an electrician. And only made a fraction of what the electricians for the city municipality made, only made a fraction of what they made and yet I was expected to do similar work.

When she transitioned from a client-facing role, to an internal professional development role, Alexis, a senior manager at a large consulting firm, had to adapt the insider-outsider culture that delineated the two employee groups:

I would say that as a whole, there's a very clear delineation between “we bring in the money and you don't. And so your initiatives, your priorities, your activities when on my schedule as a client-facing individual—they're going to take a lower priority because they have to. They don't pay the bills.” And I was fine with that, because that's the perspective that I came from as well. Whenever you had a list of things to do, you always did the things that were going to generate revenue first and then make time for these other things. A lot of people had trouble with that,

though. The biggest challenge that I had is that when I was client-facing, I could go to my client and say, “I need more time, more resources or more money.” And I couldn’t do that internally.

Playing the Game

This code refers to instances where participants felt they were required to “play along” rather than rock the boat or truly fix a problem. Rick, an auditor, explained the steps he took to ensure his time was billed as revenue generating, even when he was not that busy:

There’s a lot of delays and everything else that go on. You’d have planned what you were supposed to be doing for a certain amount of time. It would get delayed, whether the client wasn’t ready to provide you the documents that you need, things that get passed around. They’d try to like occupy your time elsewhere. A lot of times those hours would get logged in. You would charge another job the hours, and it’s just constant moving ship that you’re trying to navigate and figure out where to place people and keep people busy. But I got that. I understood it, so I tried to play the game, and I mean, and not create too much of a fuss if I wasn’t busy, and then I worked hard when I was, but you really don’t have much control over your schedule here. So, people wouldn’t fuss a ton if they weren’t working or if they weren’t being allocated correctly. You kind of just wanted to go with the flow, kind of think that’s the best way to describe it.

Lisa, a biracial account planner who served on the firm’s diversity council, shared how she saw her organization play the corporate diversity game:

Like acquisitions—I think the bigger agenda and bigger issue is just acquisition and mergers—bring me more money, using less people and then acquiring other companies. And they’re thinking globally. I think they’re just thinking about, ‘Okay, how can I do all these things without getting slapped with fines and lawsuits from the NAACP and whoever else?’ So that’s it. It’s a matter of growth and managing risk. And that’s it. Go hire enough people so that way if they don’t get sued. They’ll hire enough minorities or they’ll do enough something just to be doing it. But that’s it. They don’t really have any big lofty goals—missions. They’re just big company.

Ron, a chemical maintenance technician explained how he was required to play the paperwork game:

What would basically end up happening is I would do my [paperwork] section and leave it for him, and when we came to swap out for lunch, I would leave the paperwork for him to sign. Of course, when I leave and go to lunch and he tells me it's all done and it's stapled, then I assume that he did. Well, I actually got brought up [for discipline] because they had two or three packets [without my partner's signature].

My direct supervisor who was not mean in any way, shape, or form but again, very non-personable. Some of us had had a very straightforward talk. It's like, "You can't miss all these signatures," and every single sheet I'm looking at all of my signatures are there. I'm like, "You know that's my signature, right?" And I'm not trying to be combative about it, but I'm trying to point out the flaw in the logic. Where it's like, okay, "Well, if I did my part and you dropped the ball, why are you lecturing me?" Like why am I the one with the ball?

And the honest answer is sure, I should have checked the paper to make sure both of our signatures were on there, but if obviously there's a key that the bigger problem is not me, then why are you coming after me? This was kind of just like that blind corporate mindset they did something that just did not sit well with me. Like, okay, so I'm culpable for the mistakes of everyone. I don't really get along with that.

MANAGING THE SELFISH SYSTEM: THE ROLE OF HUMAN RESOURCES

While the Selfish System is an outcome of the everyday interactions of members, it also requires effort and structure to maintain. The Human Resources function serves the purpose of maintaining the Selfish System. Participants' comments revealed an initial trust in the human resources function as an outlet for seeking fairness and justice within the organization. They were often surprised by the degree to which Human Resources actually served to reinforce and strengthen the organization's existing structures and power dynamics, thereby maintaining the predictability and stability of the organization.

Mabel's experience reflects the hurt and anger generated when one realized that their trust in the organization—and often a specific leader—had been violated. Mabel put in many long hours, and performed the workload of two full-time positions during lean

economic times, only to see her boss be unwilling to fully advocate for her to receive a raise once her school district's financial situation improved:

Well, when I asked her for the raise, she said she would look into it. So, I told her what I found out [from a friend who worked n HR] and then she said she went to the HR director and said, "You know, this is what's been found out, Mabel was wondering..."

Well, the HR director, it's kind of a long mess, but before, when the old superintendent was there, they were supposed to give certain people in the offices raises and they didn't. And so then it came to light last year, about a year ago, they said, "Hey, secretaries A, B, and C will get raises from both superintendents," but then they said, "Okay, well, let's give them their back pay and let's give them an extra dollar for their trouble, well, let's give them an extra two dollars for their trouble."

And so when my boss went and said, "Hey, Mabel found this out and was wondering if she can get a raise, it was, "Oh no, because she wasn't promised that raise three years ago, she wasn't in that category." It kind of didn't make sense, but that was the reasoning. So when my deputy superintendent came back, she said, "Listen, I looked into it and they said this is the reason why you can't get a raise. My hands are tied."

Q: And so how did it make you feel when she said that to you?

I cried. I came home and I told my husband, I said, I'm driving 32 miles there and 32 miles back and I feel like I give them more than I give my family. I give them—at night, I give them evening time. Sometimes I give them weekend time. I give them my emotional state. I give them everything my heart can give them and then when I ask for this raise and I don't get it, I felt defeated.

As Mabel's experience highlights, participants revealed three primary themes that

characterized their overall experiences with Human Resources processes, policies and

personnel. These three themes included: Unfavorable Human Resources Philosophy,

Dysfunctional Performance Review Processes and Dysfunctional Compensation

Practices.

Unfavorable Human Resources Philosophy

This code captures participants' sensemaking reflections related to their organization's approach to Human Resources. Observations noted here reflect individuals experienced changes in their organization's HR philosophy over time. Additionally, participants compared their current organization's approach to HR with that of previous employers. Together, these sensemaking efforts generated perceptions of broken trust as members realized that HR was protecting the organization from the, rather than helping them correct problematic, and even unethical, practices within the organization.

Several members reported experiencing HR actually partnering with their managers to silence them and, in some cases, exact retribution for speaking up. Negative experiences with Human Resources, which often occurred when an individual reached out to Human Resources for help in managing a conflict with their direct manager or when they had a seemingly innocuous policy question, were frequently cited as a source of concern and frustration. These experiences were seen as a turning point in how the individual viewed the organization. Rebecca noticed how Human Resources practices had changed from a very *human* focus when she first joined the technology start-up company out of college, to a largely *human-less* focus that evolved in the years after the organization became integrated into the large multinational organization that had acquired it during her tenure:

My husband now works for a company that's similar to Pedigree [original company]. It's not a start-up because it's more stable than that, but they also still have a lot of the same qualities that Pedigree had. I guess what I would say is that Global Tech had a really good party line. They would say things like, "We believe in your career development. You, as an individual, are important and we believe in your career development." They would have all these processes around – you could download a manual that says—if you want to increase your career, here are the steps that you can take. But there weren't people that did that. The managers are so overworked. They're not given clear goals. They don't have direct, clear paths to what they need to get to, to actually have a career path. HR is now all

on-line. There's not a real person. And if there is a real person, she now has 800 people instead of 20 people to manage. She—or he—can't give you the attention. So they have the party lines, but then it doesn't – it's not real. There's no real social network, social support for the human beings that are working there.

Conversely, Mary experienced Human Resources practices that did more harm than good, as they breached her expectation of confidentiality when she expressed concerns in good faith:

Another thing with a bigger organization like that is Human Resources. They have had the same Human Resources people there for years, which is fine, but I felt that every time if I had an issue or there's something that I wanted to discuss to HR, it was immediately — it wasn't really kept confidential or [they did not] help me to work with my manager to get it achieved the right way and get it resolved. It was immediately taken over to the president of the company saying, "Well, Mary feels this and this and this and this," and then he knows about it, and he's the one that makes the decision and says, "Well..." HR really had no influence in the company to help employees." It almost felt like I was talking to a dead end door. It wasn't kept confidential, and then later on, it was kind of held against you.

Joe, a sales assistant, explained how he was "punished" for scheduling a vacation during a time that was not particularly busy for the sales team, but fell within a period of time where employees were forbidden to take vacation because of heavy customer care volume:

I remember talking to my boss and the owners, who dealt a little bit more with the sales stuff, about possibly taking off. My boss was okay with it. The owners kind of frowned upon it, because that was their general policy. And then operations really frowned upon it because they didn't want [other employees to perceive unfairness]. I remember that was one thing that was a little aggravating, just trying to have to go through four different people. And then having all these varied opinions.

My vacation was approved but with conditions, even though I had time to take. I had to agree to work late for about an hour a day for a month and then a couple of Saturdays, just almost as a punishment. We were busy, but we weren't that busy to where the hours I was working justified me being there. I've always been a team player, never wanted to put my coworkers or associates in the hole for not being there. That was one of the things that I didn't quite understand because I think if we would have been that busy and if I really needed to work an

extra 30 hours to help the company catch up, I think I definitely would have. I wouldn't have had a problem with that. But the fact that I—basically, just to punish me, they wanted me to stay an extra 30-40 minutes, until 6:00 at night when there were no sales calls to make and I had gotten all my work done during the day and things like that. It just wasn't—to me, it wasn't a very—handled very well.

Alyssa's experience reveals something about both the culture of the organization and the role of Human Resources. Alyssa was five months pregnant and had recently been told by her supervisor that she would not be receiving the new job opportunity that fit with her professional background because her boss told her she was “not comfortable putting a new mom in those positions.” Struggling both with this news and feeling like an outsider as she struggled to make friends, Alyssa had shared the details of the promotion denial conversation with another new hire when they attended an out-of-state conference together. Alyssa was surprised to be called in to speak with Human Resources a couple of weeks after the conference:

I went outside with HR—we were sitting on the patio and she said, “Well this person who went on the trip with you told us what you said about not getting the job.” She had gone to HR and told them that my boss had said it was because I was pregnant and going to be a new mom. And I just thought that was a really, really shady underhanded thing to do. She went to HR the day she knew I was going to be out of the office. And then she was going to be out of the office the 3 days after she told.

And so, it just was really weird and made me feel very uncomfortable. It really created a lot of problems because it got my boss in trouble. And, of course, my boss was mad at me for having told someone that she said that when that's not what she meant. It turned into a really, really big mess. I hadn't made a connection with anybody. So, five months into my job when I thought I was making a connection with someone, she turns around and actually stabs me in the back with it.

Alyssa realized that her travel partner had shared every detail of their conversations at the conference with HR, representing an additional layer or trust violation:

It just turned into this huge nightmare...At the end of that conversation with HR she said, “Did your boss tell you that you couldn’t have the jobs because you’re pregnant? I said, “Yes.” And then she said, “Did you say that there’s nowhere for you to pump?” I said, “Yes.” She said, “Okay, we’ll figure something out about that.” I said, “Where does this conversation go from here?” And she said, “Well what do you mean?” I said, “Are you going to talk to my boss about this? Or have you already spoken with her?”

She said, “Well we haven’t spoken with her, but that is the plan.” I said, “Well, that’s going to make my work life miserable because she has a temper and she’s going to get really mad at me.” And the look on—in hindsight – the look on the HR woman’s face was, ‘Oh, shit, I’ve already talked to her.’

As Alyssa’s case alludes to, in extreme cases, participants felt like Human Resources, and the organization itself, treated them like the problem, instead of helping them figure out how to solve the problem. Chloe and Darren both reported going into meetings with Human Resources expecting help in navigating difficult workplace relationships—Chloe was being pressured by her manager to do work for a client without a contract in place, while Darren was seeking help with an underperforming subordinate. Both were surprised when Human Resources treated *them* as the problem in their respective situations.

Chloe felt abandoned by the Human Resources representative during a meeting about the issues with her manager. Darren was subject to surprise attack when the Human Resources director flew in from another state to question *his* behavior in the situation with his subordinate. Unknown to Darren, his boss had already met with this director to express concerns with Darren’s approach to dealing with subordinate, given the relationship that Darren’s boss had formed with the subordinate.

I hadn’t necessarily cataloged everything, but from time to time I would check in with the team lead and say, “Okay, she’s doing well in this. She’s not doing so well in that.” She was, I guess, if I had to rate her, I would say she was just below average. She still needed some work. She wasn’t, certainly, you hope that

someone would be trained, a new employee would take it upon themselves to say, “Okay, I need to show that I’m progressing in my job with this company. She wasn’t doing that. She was basically at the same level as she was when she started.” So as I had been doing these things, sharing it with my team lead, and the instance where I asked her did she have anything going on personally, take some time off, handle it, and we’ll talk when you get back. I guess she had taken offense of that or used that to manipulate my team lead, he then contacted Human Resources. We didn’t have an HR person in the building—she was in New Jersey.

Darren also learned that his manager had a pre-existing relationship with the HR director based on trying to get one of his previous team members fired for underperformance. Unaware of this pre-existing relationship at the time or the conversations that had taken place between his manager and this HR director, Darren walked in to a surprise meeting to discuss the situation with his subordinate:

The HR director flew in from New Jersey, sat down with me. I had no foreknowledge of it, and she had not told anyone that she was coming in, other than my team lead and the new hire that was reporting to me. So, only two people knew about it. She didn’t tell our vice president. She didn’t tell the senior vice president, and she comes in, and she calls me into an office. When I stepped in, I hadn’t even shut the door and she said, “You know why we’re here, right?”

I just felt like I was on trial or I was under interrogation. We went through like an hour-long Q & A process. It was all about how—again, I felt like I was on trial. I didn’t really have a chance to say, “This is what’s been going on.” It was, “Okay, your team lead says this. How do you respond to that? Your direct report says this. How do you respond to that?” It was me having to defend myself in front of this HR director who it seemed like she had already built her case and she was just wanting to back check it against what I thought was my version of events. So that happened.

In the end, Darren felt that neither his boss nor the HR director had any interest in truly listening to or resolving the performance issues, rather they viewed his situation as a tool to use to mitigate their own personal risk, while also positioning themselves for professional advancement:

I’d say it was gamesmanship based. The HR director, she was newer to the company than I was. She’d had a long-standing business relationship with my team lead, and I think he was using their business relationship to support himself.

I think he was determined not to be the one to look bad. He wanted to paint me in a bad light, and I think it was several things. I have no idea what their conversations were about. I do know that in every interaction I had with the HR director—because I had also called her after she had come in and said, “Look, I’d like another opportunity to just you and me talk without having this accusation that I’m interfering in a subordinate’s personal life, but let me tell you my side of the story.”

I don’t know if she had an axe to grind or was just trying to prove herself and establish herself in the company, if I was like the first opportunity, the first piece of fresh meat on a hook for her to come along and say, “I’m going to make a name for myself at this company, and Darren is the best way for me to do that.” That’s probably—that’s my take, that’s my guess on why she was so aggressive, and why she wouldn’t listen to me.

As these examples illustrate, individuals often come to feel that Human Resources was not there to help and protect them as organizational members needing help in successfully navigating relationships and bureaucracy as they strive to fulfill their role-based responsibilities, but rather HR’s goal was to serve and protect the organization’s leadership and policies, often positioning individuals seeking help as a threat to the system, even as troublemakers. Similar issues were often experienced related to an organizational process critical to the careers of most organizational members—the performance review.

Dysfunctional Performance Review Processes

This code captures issues participants noted with the performance review process, from not receiving one at all, to feeling like the process was rigged, to receiving a performance rating that did not fairly reflect one’s actual contribution. Some participants noted having to directly ask to receive their annual review, while others noted specific issues with the process itself, or with the mixed messages they received from or about the process. John was irritated that his supervisor, Jeff, was not the one to do his review, and had not interacted with John in almost a year while also directly refusing to train John.

John suspected all of this was because Jeff had an issue with him being the only African American in the factory, and that getting his annual review from someone other than his direct supervisor was “a bunch of crap,” as it signaled to John that management was protecting Jeff in doing this task for him.

After working 80—100 hour weeks along with all of his colleagues, Rick realized there was a “falseness” in the system that allowed only five percent of the company’s employees to receive the highest performance rating, despite the hours and productivity of the entire team. As a result, he did not place much weight on the process as a measure of his actual contribution:

I kind of just drank the Kool-aid and did the reviews and made sure I followed procedures and everything else. But I never really took them like they were a direct reflection of my work level... I just [tried to] maintain a good attitude and not be broken by what’s going on, and I think at that point, to me I had a goal in mind. I needed to get my year of experience under my belt to have—I got my CPA—and in order to have that recognized, so that’s kind of what I utilized as, “Well I’m just kind of going to get through this” and it’s all the survival mode in a sense. That was kind of my motivating factor throughout. I wasn’t necessarily motivated by the rating. I wanted to do enough to kind of keep my job and everything else, but I found out pretty quick after working crazy hours and everything else that it wasn’t the best fit. I came in with an open mind with it, and wanting it to be a good fit, but ultimately it wasn’t.

Chris noticed a similar falseness in the performance review system at his job. Additionally, while he at first admired the company’s commitment to not laying off workers, he realized that strategy amplified unintended consequences generated by a false system:

At the time, I thought it was interesting, because that aspect that was really attractive as far as not laying off people ended up being one of the things that ended up being somewhat of a driver for me leaving, because what I noticed was the larger part of MobileTech implemented a lot of the what they call RPA—Relative Performance Assessment—which is a lot of the GE model, as far as identifying who those bottom ten or bottom five percent people are, and essentially kind of laying them off, basically get rid of people who are poor performers.

The interesting part that I noticed with having that 100% retention and not laying off anybody is it almost worked in the opposite direction. What I noticed is that the top tier people ended up leaving because for the people that were in the lower tier, it was really attractive because you had a lot of job stability. You just wouldn't get laid off. Those people were retained almost 100%, whereas your top performers, they weren't identified as much, and they weren't compensated highly, so those were the people that ended up leaving... That didn't lead to a very positive work environment.

For Tim, a private in the Army, his advancement depended on completing a variety of physical activities and online correspondence courses to acquire points to advance to the next rank. He found this process confusing and felt that, along with the number of Army members enlisted during his tenure, it thwarted his advancement:

As an individual, trying to pick up rank, I would have to—an E5 would make a sergeant, and that's what you would be actually trying to pick up, actually trying to achieve when you do all your stuff you had to do, you know, rifle range, correspondence, and going to the board and stuff. I already did it for a while. Then I would have to pick up an E4 before I could even start doing my studies on turning work to pick up my E5 rank.

Well, what I'm saying is coming in the military, we already know the knowledge, you know what I'm saying? Like the Army song and all the Army stuff. But what I'm saying is like to retrieve it, we had to get it online, and so to retrieve that stuff online was weird. It was difficult. Nothing was really put together, the relations to like, you know, not the easy knowledge, not the stuff you get can get in the book, but I'm saying like, you know, just the whole internet, you know, that side of it was just weird. I just couldn't put it together. It took me a while. And the point system was messed up. It took a while to get my points right.

Jim encountered a similarly confusing process. In this case, Human Resources changed the performance review process every year, making it difficult for Jim to understand or benefit from the process:

Every time that I got a review, there was a new process. So, "Okay, we're going to give reviews this year. We are defining that process as we speak." Every time it happened, it was something different. And, of course, they were so far apart that

there was no correlation from one to the other. It wasn't like, "Yeah, you've really improved in these areas." It was just all new stuff.

Dysfunctional Compensation Practices

This code captures issues with the most material element of Human Resources practices, the salary and benefits received in exchange for one's work. Common issues shared by participants reflected a belief that their compensation did not match their contribution to the organization (or the personal sacrifice required to make that contribution), perceptions of unfairness when compared to what they felt—or knew—colleagues received, and/or concerns about wages and benefits that were simply not enough to cover their living expenses. Paul sacrificed time with his family and involvement with his community due to the amount of time he had to travel out of town for work. The small amount of additional monetary compensation the company began offering was not appropriately compensatory in his eyes:

There was no additional opportunity to earn additional income through a bonus or however you wanted to call it. The only thing the firm did implement was additional income after you had achieved 24 nights of chargeable business travel, you earned 50 dollars for each overnight stay but it really wasn't a motivator.

The amount that I earned was 900 dollars. Given what I had to give up to be away from home, it just wasn't—you know, you make that decision whether it's worth the value for the price you have to pay and it wasn't. Whereas, in my current job, now I'm back on a bonus situation that is basically a blend of how well the bank does financially, but also then my contribution, so if I choose—if I need to get something done, then I make that decision—will this help me earn a bigger bonus? I'll make that decision at that time to put in any additional, the extra effort, in the way of additional hours.

Similar to other executive-level individuals interviewed, Jerry, the CFO of an energy start-up recently acquired by a larger public company, grew frustrated at not receiving additional bonuses and compensation he felt he earned based on his impact on

the business' success, as well as the number of hours and effort he put in on behalf of the company:

It was the frustration, but that led to my decision that a lot of our compensation and ability to make money for ourselves, which is ultimately why you work, was going to be impacted by their decisions. So, to not be able to have the ability to impact my own compensation made me say, "You know what? I can do better elsewhere." I was working 100 hour weeks around the clock. Which, frankly, after 13 years of banking, that was how I worked so I didn't know any different. But for the amount of effort and work that I put into it, to not be able to impact my compensation or my ability to make money—forget it. I'm not going to work that hard to not be able to have that kind of impact.

On the other end of the hierarchy, Mabel, a school administrative assistant felt manipulated by the close personal relationship her boss nurtured with her, only to then fail to fully advocate for the raise Mabel felt she had earned after successfully fulfilling the responsibilities of two full-time positions for over a year:

She would always say that I was like her surrogate daughter. I just told her, I was like, that's crap [not getting a raise], that's not fair. There was another director that got like a 15,000 dollar raise and I said, that's crap. This person got 15,000 dollars and I understand she's a director. I understand she has her degree. I get it, but I'm your secretary. I'm working two full-time jobs and HR won't even think about giving me a couple dollars, three or four dollar raise. She just kept saying, I'm sorry, my hands are tied. And so, she's such a smart, educated woman. She had to know that that raise was part of the reason why I left.

Others realized that the base pay was never appropriate for their profession and the amount of work expected of them. Peter, the manager of a busy bar and music venue, only accepted his low salary job—which he discovered was based on the poor performance of the previous bar manager—because he was promised a significant bonus:

The reason why they made such a big deal about the bonus from day one is that part of my salary was this bonus structure. They were like, "So here's X amount of dollars on a paycheck, but don't worry, that if that number seems low. You've got this killer bonus structure."

I definitely was not happy with my compensation at all, which forced me to call off employees and stand behind the bar myself so I could get tips. The managerial salary typically in a bar/restaurant is never great, but it was really bad. So I said, “Well, all my bosses that I’ve worked below or that I started bartending.” It was a nightclub style. It was super high impact, my boss worked in the well next to me. So, I’ve always had my bosses in the trenches with me, and so I said, “Look, if you guys are going to pay me less, I’m going to take some shifts. I’m going to work on the weekends so I get paid because I need to make some money.” They weren’t going to pay me [appropriately] because the previous guy was horrible. That’s why they hired me, because he was so bad. Well, I know how much you were paying Aaron, so — anyway, yeah. The compensation was bad.

Brad, a construction worker, noticed that his higher than average level of productivity in his intensely physical job digging out home foundations was not reflected in his pay:

The working and the casting—just mud and water for weeks on end and the heat. They were just pushing too much. There were people making more money than I was that didn’t do half of the stuff that I did. It was just annoying. It was real bad.

Sally, a receptionist, knew that her wages were very low, but because her monthly Social Security check provided a small amount of additional income, she did not become bothered by this fact until she and her peers were expected to do additional “projects”:

Everybody that was there was looking for something else, other than the older people. There was a couple older ladies. Well, I shouldn’t say that either, because they weren’t happy with the pay either. Everybody was really disgruntled with the pay. But we didn’t have to do that much at that time. But prior to my leaving, they were starting to expect people to do more. They called them projects, but basically it was doing work for other departments within the group. They were starting to expect them to do more work, but not offering any more pay for doing the additional work. A lot of people were getting a little unsatisfied with that. They were looking for [other] work anyway, but when they started doing that, then people became more dissatisfied because they felt like they were being asked to do more and weren’t being compensated for taking on the additional work.

Feelings of unfairness were also generated when individuals felt they were outperforming peers, yet receiving the same, or even less, salary than similar coworkers.

When Zach received the same small pay increase as everyone else in his unit, he grew frustrated:

Maybe this does lead into philosophies because I kind of touched upon this earlier. To not be so politically correct in having to give everyone a little piece of the pie. I love referring to *The Office*. I don't know if you ever watched that show. There's the episode where Dunder Mifflin has a surplus and they're deciding how to give raises. And they have the bean method. And one of the things was, "Oh let's give everyone two beans." And yeah, sure, that is the easy way. But I would challenge universities in general to have more measures of success and how to track that success, with goals in having to chart your numbers—and then the ultimate goal being more merit raises, as opposed to everyone just getting a simple cost adjustment.

Sam was confused when his boss, the company's owner spoke poorly of Sam's more tenured peers, who Sam knew received higher compensation than he did:

Yeah, [he would say,] "Evan's not good for anything. Evan's not good for this, not good for that. I gave him a task to do and it took him three weeks, and Sam, it only you one week," type of thing. So it's like, well, if that's the case, you know, we knew we weren't getting paid as much as Evan, so that's why it was frustrating, too. It was like, well, you're putting these people down; however, they're getting paid a good amount more than we are. So it was like, what does that mean?

There were a lot of workers—because it was a small company, too—there was that were underpaid. Overworked and underpaid was definitely a theme. There were holidays—because it was a small company, you would expect to have small company benefits, as far as flexibility. I had to take a paid vacation day Christmas Eve last year. Everybody else's family in the company lived in Houston and everything. It was, "Oh, we'll just have a half day on Christmas Eve."

Todd, who started with a large multinational bank as a part-time teller in college, began to realize how this point of entry—and the promotion process associated with it—benefited his employer:

When I started as a part-time teller, when I was in school, I was earning what was a pretty good—I mean, I guess it was a good pay rate as a college student. And then I thought the way to get a higher salary was to get promotions and so as I

was getting promotions, [but] that was not necessarily the case because in most times, it ended up to be just a flat percentage increase rather than what the market rate for the job was, so I'd say that was probably my one qualm with the company. Just that being promoted internally seemed like it was – almost like it was being taken advantage of pay-wise because they already knew what you made, so you got your offer and they didn't have much more they were paying you other than having to hire someone externally and give them a fair offer...It actually kind of made me feel like they were being very opportunistic with their employees and almost to the point of taking advantage of them.

For interviewees working at the lower end of the wage scale, the simple insufficiency of wages and/or benefits to meet the needs of their family, combined with the emotional labor often characteristic of these customer service positions, often became a significant issue. As a third-party contracted receptionist, single mother Kim struggled to support her family of five with a full-time job that paid \$18,000 a year:

I am a single mom. I have four children and the pay was lacking to say the least. I realized that while what I was doing was something I really enjoyed, I liked the relationships and professionalism that I was in control of, the professionalism on my end that I presented and that I upheld, but it just wasn't—I was working well below my means. I wasn't doing myself any justice because I wasn't using my degree. I wasn't using the education that I had worked so hard for and that I was doing a disservice to my children.

...I could go and flip burgers at Dairy Queen and make more than I made as a receptionist. I think there just needed to be better pay, if for nothing else, the appreciation for what they did simply because we took the brunt of angry customers who were upset that their computers weren't working, that something else went wrong, when I call to talk to someone in customer care, I get someone who doesn't speak English and is from another country. I mean the names I've been called, things that have been said to me, language that has been used.

Ron, also a third-party contractor, dealt with similar financial hardships related to his low-wage job and the opportunity costs associated with it:

I actually went into OE under financial hardship, and got a little ways out of financial hardship, not by a lot. Like I said, they didn't pay a lot for the austerity that they were asking us to deal with. If I tell you, "Hey, you're going to work 12 hours a day, and you're going to make \$20 an hour," sure. Yeah. All right, it's worth it. But if you're going to work 12 hours a day and they're going to pay you

somewhere around \$13 an hour, that starts to get on the level of is it really worth what you're paying me to do? You're basically asking me to be up for around 18 hours a day, and that doesn't count social interactions, personal relationships, time to feed and bathe yourself...I actually went into OE with a really serious financial situation. I had no money. When I took that job, it was like, thank God you're paying for my steel toe work boots because I don't have the money for that...\$13 an hour, that doesn't buy you a lot of leeway, and of course, you have cars break down or your dog gets in trouble and you've got to take it to the vet. Just normal life expenditures. You're still going to eat away at that.

Overall, participant comments about Human Resources reveal system-related sense-making and an awareness that this system was one designed to reinforce its own stability, predictability and profitability, rather than caring for and rewarding its members. From the absence of a designated Human Resources function—to Human Resources activated to mitigate risk, protect the status quo and silence dissent—participants found themselves unprepared for navigating the demand for personal sacrifice, breaches of trust, lack of communicative and material support, and even direct assault they received from individuals they thought were going to help them resolve difficult workplace situations. In the end, these experiences with Human Resources were frequently cited as either an early red flag or a last straw in participants' decision to exit an organization, likely because of the violation of expectations represented by such negative and traumatic experiences.

THE SELFISH SYSTEM OUTCOMES: REPLACEABILITY & DISRESPECT

The intersection of the three core communicative and material dimensions of The Selfish System create a variety of outcomes for organizational members. Based on participant narratives, navigating these outcomes becomes both a form of additional work and a source of frustration that can lead to exit. The sensemaking process occurs over time and through observations of the organization's apparent priorities, values and

decision-making processes. For Joe, this process began after he observed how his coworkers were treated when they asked to take vacation time:

I started to see that it really was more, to me seeing them, for them it was more about the money, just bringing in that money and not caring really about their employees at all, even if it meant—if they'd lose an operations person, "That's okay, we'll just hire somebody else and train them." It doesn't really matter. They're not that important. Almost, that the employees were pretty much replaceable. That's kind of what it felt like after being there for a little over a year.

Jacob experienced the systematic corrosion wreaked by The Selfish System after a new leader based in an office in another city began making significant changes to operational processes and staffing at Jacob's formerly high-performing site. Over a period of several months, Jacob witnessed and processed the impact of employees now feeling replaceable:

We were told that the plan was—well, the first thing they did was they brought in a Six Sigma Lean advisor and forced us to do these Six Sigma workshops, strip out any non-value added activities—spending an inordinate amount of time in these workshops, which I felt were maybe good if you're making widgets, not so much if you're working on private equity funds. And then, basically implemented a hiring freeze in Dallas and nowhere else. There was some attrition, then the work got to be unbearable, to where people were staying there until 10:00-11:00 at night, every night. My understanding was that there had been 87 people [out of 250] who have left in the past year, year over year.

I think it was forced attrition, but it got to the point where the good people were leaving and now that they have less of the people that kind of are less qualified. The morale just plummeted. To where the people that were left, especially at the higher levels, are there because they have some sort of equity stake and can't leave. I don't know what they think they're going to do with regards to managing the accounting of the fund, how they're going to get audits done. I don't think they have a full understanding of it. And it's kind of in crisis mode. I know that five people left last week. Two of them were friends of mine. One got a job as an assistant treasurer for Adidas in Portland. And I think her quote was, "This place was on fire a year ago. And now it's just ashes." So, that's the story behind that.

Rebecca's office went through a similar re-prioritization of resources when her former start-up company was acquired by a large multinational firm:

I [had] worked my way up to Director—I had a corner office, looking over the hill country. And they said, “Well, we’re cutting back so you’ve got to go to this other building,” which was like an old Telco building that was built in the ‘70s that literally has asbestos in the building. They have to caulk it and stuff. And all the sudden they’ll get out these warning e-mails, saying don’t go to this area because we’re going to be working over there. Yeah. There was razor wire around the parking lot. Just the ugliest, ugliest building.

So then you’re just—it’s still a good company. You’re still making a great salary. They have all the right HR benefits in place and things like that. But all of the things that make life nice are stripped away. And it’s all couched in terms of the bottom line. And they assume everybody’s on the same page of what is valuable. “Oh, as long as we make our numbers” —I don’t know. That’s why I think, when I started at Pedigree, that’s where I wanted to be, was at a company that believed in the whole person and that really valued each person in the company for who they were.

Even employees like Chris, who eventually exited his software engineering job for personal reasons rather than out of frustration with the organization, commented that certain work processes made him feel replaceable:

It felt like overkill in some terms because...you do feel a little bit more like a cog in the wheel, like a replaceable part, because they make people in charge of a relational part of the overall software. That’s somewhat related to the process, I will say, not completely. Being part of that larger organization and getting that small piece of the puzzle or small piece of the wheel or whatever you want to call it to work on, it’s not quite as motivating to know that you just fit in with a real small part of the puzzle, and you feel that you’re fairly replaceable, I guess.

Codes in this set include: Devaluing My Profession, Disincentivizing Initiative, Forcing Me to Assume Risk, Isolating Me, Looking Good on Paper, Making Me Carry the Load, Misleading and Betraying Me, Misrepresenting Me, Thwarting Me with Bureaucracy, and Watching or Monitoring Me.

Devaluing My Professional Role

Examples in this code represent treatment by the organization, managers and/or clients that indicate to participants that their professional role and expertise are not valued by organization. Alison, school psychologist, received the message that her professional expertise was secondary to parents' expectations related to what services their children should receive:

From a special education standpoint, we don't test kids for special education until we've tried a lot of different interventions and strategies. Because special education is a more restrictive setting and placement. So, you want to try everything that you can before you go to that option. And so there was actually a little girl at one of the elementary schools who was having some trouble. So, I met with the teachers. I met with the assistant principal. And we came up with a plan that I thought was pretty good and everybody was on board.

So I had actually said, "Let me type up our notes from our meeting today and I'll kind of get everything set in motion and do a lot of the back work." And so I went and did all of that. And then when I went back to the school to make sure that things were going okay and the teachers knew what they were supposed to be doing, I had a packet in my mailbox and it was permission to test this student for special education. And I was like, "What happened? I thought we were doing this plan." And the assistant principal was like, "Well, the parents wanted her tested and I didn't know what to do." So, she called her administrator—basically, the people that are above both of us and they said, "Yes, you just need to test this child. If that's what the parents want then you just need to do it."

Jerry, chief financial officer of an energy start-up acquired by a large public firm, found himself needing to constantly justify his analysis and recommendations to those in his new parent company:

There was one specific time which related to a discussion on the useful life of a solar panel. And the ability to generate a return on that asset depended on the life for some depreciation and tax purposes. The partner kept arguing for a shorter life, which hurt their own economics and investment in the business. I found myself in the peculiar element of arguing for something that would make more return on their business and they were arguing for something that would make less return on their business. It was just frustration that they couldn't see a larger

picture, and basically stunning that they would argue for less return on their investment.

...Instead of plowing forward, making the best decisions and moving forward, it was making decisions and then trying to justify them, then getting the feedback, then negotiating, then trying to come to a conclusion. So much time was spent justifying decisions and discussing whether we could make these decisions. In many ways, [after the acquisition] we had been neutered, I guess would be a good way to describe it, from making our own decisions. I think that they were trying to assert that they were in charge here.

Sally, recognized that the receptionist job she and her colleagues were performing simply was not valued by her employer, given her status as a full-time third-party contractor with low wages and a salary of less than \$20,000 per year:

It seems like it would benefit the company more to have people stay longer, to pay them a little more. In that job, there really wasn't any place to go. I think most of the people that hired on there that were younger, it was basically they were just passing through, because once they got in there and saw that there was no place to go in that particular company, I think most everybody went into those jobs realized pretty quickly that that's a dead-end job and to keep looking and to see what opportunities were available in the corporation they were currently subcontractors for. Unfortunately, they were cutting back as well. I heard people there, the employees for that major corporation, were working a lot of hours, had like extremely heavy workloads. So that wasn't looking all that attractive either.

Louise similarly felt her professional role was respected, something that manifested in her daily interaction with the pet owners who brought animals in for grooming:

It was different because I come from being a vet tech where I was more credible in people's eyes. When you would try to talk to people about their pets and they seemed like being a groomer [in a pet store] versus being in a veterinary office, they don't take you as seriously, so you see repeats of the same problem progressively over time, which was frustrating from the get-go for me.

Disincentivizing Initiative

Examples in this code point to a variety of factors that led individuals to feel like there was no point to giving any "above and beyond" effort based on what the

organization communicated was actually of value. Alisa, an elementary school teacher, was frustrated by the lack of support she received from the district to help students achieve grade level performance, as well as by how school administrators expected her to spend her time:

I think probably the first year I realized that the kids weren't getting a true education, honestly, because I saw that all the stuff was not developmentally appropriate. It was just trying to get the kid to be able to pass. I had several kids that were in a grade level and the message that I was getting was not to really teach them how to read, but to teach them how to test well enough so they can get a high a grade as possible. That's not right. I don't believe that. That's against my values because that's not a true education...

The bi-lingual classroom in all the grade levels, a lot of those teachers would need help to make big packets of reading packages and have the kids sit through them and over and over drill and drill and drill. It was like no joy in learning, but the kids, for different reasons, for various reasons, they would do better. So they would get rewarded, the teachers like were held in high esteem because of that. I knew that they weren't doing what was on our lesson plan. They would just make packets and that was just sit the kids down for hours in front of packets. And it did work because they learned how to do the packets where it was identical for the benchmark, they're identical to the state test. Through a month of packets they were able to pass, so they would get rewarded, and I didn't feel like that was appropriate. I just felt like that was not what I wanted to do. I didn't want to do that. I felt like that's one of the reasons why I quit. I didn't want to do that anymore. I didn't feel like I was being of service, and I didn't feel like I was being genuine to myself.

Samantha, a young consultant, was aggravated with the very small pay raise she received after spending several months mentoring Jim, a male peer-level consultant, as implicitly requested by a male leader:

When I would raise these issues [concerns about the mentoring situation], I was told to manage up or I was told, "Jim understands he did that wrong. He's going to do better next time." But there was never a follow-through. I always felt like if I wasn't being respected enough to have any flexibility in my job or to be given a direct route to promotion, there was no chance of me getting promoted any time soon. I knew, regardless of how hard I worked, I was not going to get promoted.

And at one point, after six months—they gave me like a 1.2% raise. And I remember just being like, ‘That’s a joke. Just don’t give me a raise. It’s been like a year and a half.’ I remember them saying that I was—I had plenty of room left in my pay-band to continue being at this level—to get plenty of more raises in the coming years before I would need to worry about promotion. And I was like, “I do. I’m going to worry about promotion from day one. Why else would I work in the field of consulting?” So I just knew that it didn’t matter how hard I worked, there wasn’t a resolution that was going to get me promoted or help me to feel more like they valued me. It just seemed very sexist.

Jim, who worked as a home-based software consultant, went several years without receiving any feedback—formal or informal—on the quality or value of his contributions. This absence of feedback left him frustrated:

[They should] understand that everybody is valuable, I guess. Everybody is valuable to the organization. Everybody is valuable to everybody. If there are people there that aren’t of value, maybe you ought to question why they’re there. I think that’s pretty critical. I like to feel like my job’s important. But I like to feel like I’m important, too. Right? And I don’t even mind if I do something wrong, tell me about it. That’s fine. Then I will understand the mistake. If I do something good—I don’t expect—you don’t have to give me huge praise. Just say, “Nice job. That was cool.” Or, whatever. It’s simple. It’s not expensive stuff...[Also] I went three years without a review. No review. No raise. No official feedback at all. For three years. And I worked with people who had been there six-seven years that hadn’t had that.

Forcing Me to Assume Risk

This code captures examples of where individuals were put in situations by organizations where they as individuals were forced to assume risk on behalf of the organization. Forms of risk ran from career threat, to solely assuming the responsibility to satisfy clients, to assuming personal safety risk due to a lack of appropriate procedures or resources. Ivy was forced to assume risk in numerous ways during her tenure. In one example, when she first joined a client project with a top technology company - a very valuable, but challenging client for her firm—she was not told initially that her “real

task” was to help one of the client’s key manager’s become a more people-focused leader:

I was brought in to do like communications plan, training plan, change management plan. It was really tactical. Like, we need to build organizational change management capabilities alongside of those projects. But really, I was brought in to help him be a more effective leader. I sorted that out, but it took a long time. It was his resistance, because he didn’t want to probably admit he needed help in doing that because he came from IBM. He’s a smart guy and he works at TechnoGiant and he’s, of course, smarter than me. Which the rest of the team might think he knew that. Nobody told me, because nobody trusted me. They weren’t sure if I was going to make it because I saw people getting kicked out of there on a daily basis. It’s such a weird place. But once we sorted that out, it was like, ‘Okay. Good.’ So, we finally got to the real point on why I was there. And not that it went unsaid, but it wasn’t something we talked about on a daily basis. It was like, “Okay. We’ll get there.

In another example, when Ivy ultimately decided to transition from client work to an internal opportunity that would leverage her experience by training new managers for the firm, her leadership refused to participate in breaking the news to her current client, whose project she would be leaving:

It was just a tough project and there weren’t a lot of women senior managers that were available. It was all supply and demand and a lot of work to be able to do that, to tell the client why they were taking me off. I’m like, “Well, one way or another, you’re going to have to do it. Either I’m going to tell them that I’m taking a new job or you’re going to find somebody else. You got to do it either way.” And they ended up just letting me do it myself. So I was like, “Alright.” I told the client. She was pissed. She’s like, “You’re leaving to go do internal work at Big Time Consulting?” I’m like, “Yeah.” Part of it is I just haven’t had really the support here. But it’s for personal reasons. Like I’m leaving. They were pissed.

I found someone really fabulous because it didn’t take that much to tap into my network and find somebody to do the job. But they didn’t do that. “It’s kind of pathetic, but not only can I leave on good terms with the client, but find you somebody who’s going to do this job really well. Like, shame on you. I think you should really not feel great about that because, oh by the way, I’ve been top talent every fucking year.” It was one of those—I felt very hurt and felt very, “Thanks.

Thanks for the support. Thanks for showing that people care.” People don’t care. I’m a cog. Fuck you. I got real angry.

Risk assumed was sometimes more material as well. Luke, a building maintenance technician, was expected to assume significant physical risk in service to his airport restaurant client’s desire to avoid losing revenue:

Well, they wanted you to work on equipment. They did not want the equipment shut off because they were losing money if the equipment was shut off. And so, you kind of had to troubleshoot what the problem was with the equipment turned on, which is unsafe. Also, when you work with electricity and the restaurants were very dirty, very greasy and grease and dirt are conductors of electricity, which made it unsafe and the floors were greasy, dirty. So, walking up and down a ladder when you have grease on your shoes is not safe, so things like that and, it was just an unsafe environment. I mean, it wasn’t a safe environment to work in.

On one occasion I had to rewire a plug, a grill. Electrical plug. And actually another employee was doing it and, and he was trying to work and the cooks were throwing meat into the deep fryers which splashed grease all over him. They were laughing. He had to go to the doctor because he had grease burns all over him and I was supposed to relieve him to finish the job. I expressed concerns to my boss about that and he downplayed it and made it seem to be no big deal. He wound up finishing the job because I had concerns about it.

Isolating Me

This code refers to examples of when participants felt physically and/or socially isolated. Individuals were either isolated from others or from important decisions or projects within the organization. Ron spoke of the general culture of isolation he experienced on the job, an isolation reinforced through micromanagement:

That job was kind of basically you work 12-hour shifts. We had to show up 15 minutes prior to your shift, which was at 6:00 p.m. So that basically means you were up at 4:00 to be at a facility before 6:00 to work 12 hours and then get off, but during that time, you have to put your initials 14 times on the same piece of page for every single step-by-step micromanaged process to change out a cylinder. I wish I was exaggerating, but that’s your day for 12 hours.

That’s kind of your day for 12 hours, and that, it kind of drains you. You kind of have this culture where it’s all very safety based, and that’s respectable

and understandable so materials are handled, but for 12 hours a day putting your signature on individual pieces of paper becomes — 12 hours, it wears on you, and there's not a lot of remedy, there's no camaraderie. It wasn't really a good environment. I know work is work, but at a certain point it would be [nice to be] sort of amicable with the people you're around and that doesn't really happen there, or not to my knowledge.

Jim became isolated when his California-based company decided to close the Austin office and have these employees work from home offices instead:

I had been there about three years. They—again, a California based company—decided they were going to close the office in Austin, where the company had started, by the way. They closed the office and basically told everybody, “You can all just go work from home. We're going to close the office.”

Q: And how did that change things, working relationships?

Oh, they essentially dissolved. We had no better relationships with the people that we worked with here than people that worked in California who we had never met. Instead of seeing each other every day and, “Hey, how was your weekend?” you never talked to anyone about their weekends or how their kid was doing in baseball or, “What are you doing this weekend?” or, “What are you doing on your vacation?” You didn't know people were going on vacation. They just weren't there. If you needed them, they were just gone.

I started looking for a job immediately. I didn't like it. The same thing we were talking about earlier—the whole structure thing. Only that was worse. That was absolute lack of structure. On a personal level, at the time I was living alone, I had two dogs. I'd get up in the morning and sit at my desk in my house, work all day. And when you're done with work, you make something to eat and maybe you sit and watch a little TV or something. I would go literally days without seeing another person. Just brutal. You can fall into some really bad habits that way. Luckily, I didn't, but you can.

Ivy felt isolated by the gendered nature of her role, and the value her largely male colleagues placed on her and her work as a result:

Well, part of it is, I think, is because I was in human capital and the people side is always fluffy and you're a girl dealing with the fluffy stuff. I think it's that combination is pretty apparent—like if you would ask anybody, any partner in human capital, they'd be like, “Eh, you know. It's human capital. It's fluffy. It's the soft stuff.” They still have that mindset. I think a lot of it was both my division and dealing with the people side of things, and the fact that I was a woman senior

manager, which—I would guess the majority of women senior managers at Deloitte are in human capital...It's like you fit a certain type-cast role. I think it's that type combination, so when I would sort of not be the meek one in the corner and step up and talk about business issues, it was like, "Hey man, I have an MBA. I'm beyond the help that I have on paper. I can really help from a strategic point of view." People just—a lot of times would like me to sit in the corner.

When John, the only African American on the job site, had a peer repeatedly refuse to train him, the plant's shift manager and operations manager met with John without including John's peer, causing him to feel isolated, as if he was the problem:

It was a culture there and it was a certain homeostasis there that said that, "Hey, everything's working fine. You don't take all the spokes out—you take the spoke that's week. And if you can fix it, fix it, but don't mess with the whole system." And everybody else was doing fine. Everybody else was doing fine. But I was the one that was having the problem even though it was Jeff. So they were just going to fix me and leave everything else alone.

Rita and Alyssa spoke of how the location of their desks isolated them, making it difficult to form work and social relationships soon after joining their companies. Alyssa described her workspace and its consequences:

The location of my desk was behind the pole, away from that pod of three. So, three people on the team are sitting together within five feet of each other in all directions, and then I am 15 feet away, behind a pole, that people just easily forgot that I was even there. I also think that the job itself was focused on writing and editing, and that tends to attract an introverted personality. I also think that it's the open concept. There's no office, there's no wall. There's these little cat walls designating a workspace. Conversation is loud. I think people in this environment try to limit their conversations and keep it quiet because everybody else can hear. If you're like, "Oh my god! I went out last night and I was so sick. I was so drunk." Everyone in the entire office would know. So, you don't want to do that. I tend to be slightly a bit more private and not want to share too many details of what's going on. So, I think there's a number of factors going on.

Rick also spoke of the challenges of working in an open office environment, and his effort to isolate *himself* with headphones in order to be able to concentrate on his work within an open office environment:

I kind of, in the work that I was doing, you worked at putting a lot of thought in the work, then there's work that doesn't take so much thought—it was kind of more of a clerical data entry type work. That type of work was pretty much saved for times it got real loud and I'd have trouble concentrating, I'd do more of the clerical tasks. If I needed a little bit more quiet, I might put on some music, listen through some headphones so I could concentrate that way.

Looking Good on Paper

This code highlights situations where participants realized the organization was more concerned with making things look good on paper—such as publicly espousing the company's officially documented values, or being able to report high profit margins—rather than doing things that would improve the company. Ivy, who left her job as a senior manager at a big four consulting firm and is now a teamwork and leadership consultant, explicitly noticed the difference between the firm's espoused values and what was communicated through the actions of the firm's leaders:

On paper, I think the values totally match my values. In action, no. I talk about this now a lot with my clients, about the idea of having your values match your behavior. It can't just be on a piece of paper that someone rolls out to you. You need to create them—co-create them. You need to be a part of that process. You can't just go into a place and expect them to behave like this unless they've really created them.

Rebecca, recognized the true costs associated with her large multinational firm's focus on making the numbers look good on paper:

Expense reports are really difficult to do. You'd think it'd be easy, but there are so many boxes. It has to be perfect because it's going into a database and all that stuff. So, you have managers, director-level, making \$200,000 a year, spending a good 50% of their week crunching numbers. Whereas somebody that specialized in that could do it in half the time, because that's all they do all day long. And they would like it. It makes no sense at all. But the problem is, is the way that they do the accounting, they see it as a loss to hire another individual to do all of that, but it just doesn't make sense. They don't value things that are not quantifiable like that.

Rebecca's "paper towel" story further underscores the disconnect she saw between the firm's focus on making the numbers look good on paper and what was needed for employee morale and operational efficiency:

After Pedigree was acquired, we used to have free snacks and stuff, which was a really, believe it or not, was a big benefit for people. They just liked that idea because it was something tangible that you could take every day. And maybe it was \$1 a day or whatever. But anyway, the snacks went away and everybody had an uproar. It was a little ridiculous actually, but I think it was a symbol for respect and kind of looking at us more like humans instead of computers. Anyway, our VP had this all-hands call and she says, "You know, let me just give you an example. By us not having paper towels," —oh, they took away the paper towels. We had to go to the bathroom to get paper towels if we wanted in the kitchen, where you have coffee and stuff.

"If we—by saving the paper towels we were going through," —and she had whatever number, thousands of paper towels a year at a cent a piece, "that was blah, blah, blah. So that saved three people's jobs – three FTE's jobs." People were like, "Yay! Yay!" "You see that's why we do this." And I said to my friends—of course I wouldn't say it to her, I said, "Fire the three people that aren't doing their jobs and give paper towels to the valuable people that are here." It doesn't make sense. We don't want to be bloated and have a ton of people that are there just to hang on to the salary.

Making Me Carry the Load

This code refers to examples when participants felt like their boss and/or the broader organization expected them to "make it work" despite the being inappropriately resourced. Jeremy spoke up when a leader at within his unit hired someone to be Jeremy's boss that Jeremy had worked with previously and did not respect professionally for a number of reasons:

I was given the opportunity and I stated my case pretty strongly at the time. I was told, "Well, the decision's been made and we'd like you to give him a try." The person that hired him, I respected a lot. He was actually my mentor. He's still a great guy. I got nothing bad to say about him. But he had a very bad judgment call. And I told him it. And he said, "I respect your opinion. I thank you for

sharing it. But the decision's been made and I'm going to ask you to do your best to try and work with the guy." I said, "Alright. Fair enough."

Jack, a chef, realized during a particularly busy week that his boss, the restaurant's owner, would never upgrade the constantly malfunctioning kitchen equipment, and instead would expect Jack and his crew to continue working around the problems:

We had all prepared to be busy and to kind of do a lot of people, even that week coming up to graduation, and it's always a busy week for everyone. It was just nothing was going to change. We were almost kind of planning on how we were going to work around this issue of the ovens breaking, the issue of the refrigerator breaking. We were having to take these large plastic tubs, and fill them with ice and keep all of our ingredients iced. At the time I wasn't like, oh man, nothing's going to change here, but looking back after we had finished that week, I reflected on it thinking, this was kind of how my time there was going to consist of. That's how it was going to flow. It was always going to be last minute things getting done, and there was never going to be a point when—at least when I was there—there was never going to be a point where we would be able to rely on our equipment, rely on our boss. I just felt like I had impacted the restaurant and there wasn't much more than I could do for them or for myself there.

Louise eventually incurred health issues as a result of the stress of not receiving support from managers in her effort to satisfy customers and deal with problematic coworkers:

I started to feel really overwhelmed by it all, just by the responsibility and not feeling like I had much support there. That lack of support really, made me feel like it was all on me, so that was really overwhelming for me. It was a little bit depressing because usually when I go to work, I feel like I'm really contributing something... You see the joy on the people's face...with grooming. You have a dog that comes in and looks like a total nightmare and leaves looking like a real dog and the owner is so excited and so overjoyed and so grateful. It's a nice experience, but when there's all that stress and tension involved, it's not as fulfilling. The reward doesn't outweigh the struggle and so it did start to get me depressed because I really enjoy working with animals, but the people and the environment that I'm working in isn't supportive enough to really allow me to do things the way I'd like to do them.

Misleading or Betraying Me

This code captures examples of when participants felt misled by implicit or explicit promises conveyed to them by the organization. These messages were conveyed through both individual conversations and formal organizational channels, such as the job posting, new hire information packets and other marketing materials. Paul was misled by the job posting regarding the amount and distance he would be required to travel for his job as a bank auditor:

Be completely up front about the travel requirements, which I didn't think that they were when I was hired. The case in point is the job posting that I responded to, specifically said northern Illinois, southern Wisconsin, so I assumed—incorrectly, I might add—that, okay, I'm going to be travelling to northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin. I can do that. Because I live in Lake County, which is in northern Illinois and could be easily done.

Well, I found out quickly that I would go to where the clients were and that was never divulged to me. I didn't ask it, but, again, assuming that they're posting was accurate and in my exit interview with the firm, I made it clear, to my interviewer that they either need to get the people in the offices closer to where these clients are or just let them know that they're going to be a road warrior and driving all over the place.

Conversely, the organization Rick worked for indicated he would be traveling to glamorous international locales for work and have time for nice summer vacations, when in fact he was regularly working 100 hour a week at out of town client locations, leaving no time for vacations:

Initially with their welcome packet and everything else, they talk about traveling abroad to work, and there's a certain golfer that represents this company, and it looks like fun, but you think about golfing and the brochure had people traveling to remote destinations and everything like that. They would send like summer vacation [messages] like, "Here's where so and so went on their summer vacation. So, send in your best summer vacation picked, and whoever has the best one we'll give a prize to" and stuff like that. In the summer they had this promotion that said like, "We've got to work right now", different things that they would initiate from the top down, but that you're in busy season and during the rest of the year there really wasn't that [time] whatsoever.

Although willing to temporarily “sacrifice for the company,” Sam felt misled by the amount of time he ended up working at a less desirable location to which he had been re-assigned:

The conflict that happened a lot was people’s version of time—when they’d say it’s a short time versus a long time, long period of time, it definitely differs among the generations. I would say my generation and the way I interpreted a “brief period of time” would be anywhere from a month to four months. When a brief period of time for the people that were older in the company was like a year to two-years, that would be considered a short time. I guess the biggest problem was when they told me, “Oh, it’s only going to be a brief amount of time,” I didn’t know what that meant, and I didn’t think they really knew what that meant, but they would interpret it as, “Oh, you’re only there for six months. That’s a short period of time.” But just the way the company was progressing, that would be considered a long period of the time, because every year, the company changed so much. So in six months, the company could look completely different. I would consider that a long period of time for that situation.

After successfully fulfilling the responsibility of two full-time positions for over a year, Mabel felt betrayed by her boss, who she felt did not “go to bat” for her once Mabel found out some of her peers were being paid considerably more:

Well, it came to a point last year that I felt I deserved a raise and I asked her to go to bat for me and try and get me a raise and she didn’t. I found after a couple months, it came out that some of the other secretaries below me were making eight dollars more than I was and so I felt that was kind of a turning point where, okay, I need to line up my future because I’m making this dollar amount when I could be making this dollar amount, but really what is my time worth to these people if they’re not willing to go to bat for me? It just put that taste in my mouth where I didn’t feel like at that moment, she had gone up and said, look, “Mabel’s really working hard. She’s working two full-time positions, maybe we could give her a raise.” Because even after some money started coming back through Region 13 [they did not give me a raise].

Jane, a waitress and supervisor at a family-owned restaurant felt betrayed when she realized the owners knew about illegal activities in the restaurant and were not interested addressing the issues:

Half of the employees were definitely not legal and I think there was a lot of things that the owners were doing as well that weren't legal and a lot of things under the table and I didn't think they wanted to draw any extra attention to the restaurant and so it was just a list of things and I told them that happened and they said they would take care of it and never did.

Misrepresenting Me

This code refers to examples of when participants felt their actions, or even their value, was represented by the organization or specific individuals based on the actions of those individuals. Rita felt misrepresented when a coworker complained about her to her boss:

I was delegated a project to do, a really cool children's financial day. I had to work with this other woman on coming up with ideas and I got excited, because I was finally tasked with something. I was researching this new hundred dollar bill coming out in October, so I thought about doing a drawing contest.

I sent probably maybe three or four emails to this girl, and she freaked out because I don't know if she thought I was being micromanaging or I was telling her what to do, but she went to her boss and said— complained - that she doesn't have time, and I sent her all these emails, and I mean, oh my God. So then we all had to have a meeting on Monday morning about it or something, and she told me, "I don't have time to handle this, and I don't know why they want me to handle this." Then we got to the meeting on Monday morning with my boss, her boss, the big boss, and she didn't say any of that.

Q: So what did she do in the meeting?

She didn't really say anything. I was trying to move forward, and I guess that's the culture, is that things took so—so slow there that—and the culture was old school. Everyone had their own job, you know what I mean? I'm used to small business and playing a lot of roles and wearing a lot of hats and teamwork, and this culture was just "You do this," "You do that," and "That's not my job." "That's not my job, so I'm not going to" —I mean, it's cattiness. You know what I learned early was just not to talk to anybody because that happened early on, and I realized that I couldn't confide in anyone. I didn't trust anyone.

Ivy felt symbolically misrepresented through the devaluation conveyed by always being the last person to pitch for new business, given role in human capital division,

which led change management and employee training functions during project implementations:

When you go on a proposal, a big multi-million dollar proposal and you are the last one to speak every fucking time. You've got all these dudes talking about the technical aspects of whatever you're running and you're the last one every time. You're like, "Why is human capital last? Why is the people side last? Because none of this shit's going to work unless you got the people set up to succeed." And no matter how many times I brought that business to the table, I was always last to go in proposal. There was never a proposal or an oral presentation where I was first, or even anything other than last. Like that's a really clear message, right. On the value we put on the work that we do in that space.

Thwarting Me with Bureaucracy

This code refers to examples of when participants felt that bureaucratic structures, such as hierarchy, policies or documentation requirements were used to thwart their contributions or advancement within the organization. Lisa felt thwarted in how her manager used hierarchy to dismiss her ideas:

I feel like it was soul-crushing and stifling. Like it made me feel like I had to revert back to being twelve [years old]. Not allowed to ask a question. One time I told my boss—we were kind of sitting in a strategy meeting with my boss, not with the client, and discussing our future strategy. I asked a question, "Well, isn't this going to create a problem in the future?" Basically she didn't want to like put any money into loaning to minorities or anything like that—any money at all into marketing to them.

I said, "Well isn't this going to be a problem in the future when those people actually need bank accounts?" Something like that. And her answer was so short, it was, "Well, we'll just figure it out in the future." That's what happened. Her answer to me was so – was almost like dismissive. Okay. It's like, alright, I won't even ask a question anymore if it's not even – we're not going to even talk about it. Or she would ask me to do some work for the team. I would do it. And we were supposed to present it in the next meeting. And she would just brush it off like, "Oh we didn't get to it."

Chloe spent the majority of her tenure dealing with the consequences of never being categorized with the correct job title, which impacted her job assignments, number

of hours she was allowed to work and the pay she received, resulting in many frustrating logistical challenges and conversations with administrators:

I didn't even care if I was salaried, but I at least wanted to work 40 hours. You know what I mean? If they were going to make me hourly, at least give me 40 hours to work, instead of 30. When they realized that I had two job codes and that I couldn't be salaried—they needed to make me one job code and only have one job instead of still trying to have me in two roles—they made me hourly. That was the whole entire time I was working with them that they had me in two job codes.

Ron felt “haunted” by the paperwork used to track task completion and discipline workers for violating work requirements. He compared his corporate experience to his time in the military:

The military, you screw up, know it. The block is checked, we're moving on. We're doing all this other stuff. Know you're wrong. You will suffer for it. You will be physically punished for it to a degree, like physical exercise. They make you do pushups until you can't feel your arms. But the thing is the Army is so significantly reluctant to put things on paper, there's a big culture switch for you. The military is so incredibly against putting things on paper because that will follow you around for the rest of your life, and they expect you to improve. So if you're a young soldier and you screw up, well, that's expected. If I write it down on paper, and you make it to a senior supervisor and you have three or four screw ups on your record, is that really going to haunt you for the rest of your life?

Rebecca experienced being freed from the intense bureaucracy characteristic of her organization when a new leader joined the company:

They brought in a guy from outside—he had come from a creative agency. And so he brought in a lot of fresh ideas. He actually started outsourcing a lot of our work. I was exposed to agencies in Chicago and California. That reinvigorated me because all of the sudden, I didn't have to deal with the bureaucracy anymore. Because he was so smooth and he could go around a lot of the edges, and he had me under his wing. So then all of the sudden, I'm like, 'Ah. This is where the good life is at Technocomm.'

Watching or Monitoring Me

This code refers to examples of when the organization used physical presence, organizational process, technology, and/or work structure to monitor employees either explicitly or covertly. Alisa's worked in a Title I designated school, meaning the school had a high percentage of low income students and received special federal grant funding to assist at-risk students. As a result, her second and third grade classrooms were places of surveillance and "invasion" by school administrators:

Because we're a Title I school, sometimes depending our score the preceding year, you might become a "focus school," which means that not only do you have the principal checking in on you, but you have what we call "the suits." You have the people from the main office come in and they walk through the room. And it's not just one person. You often have three people in suits, and they come in and they're standing in the back of your room and they're digging through kids' desks, and sometimes you have your own teacher area, where the kids know they're not supposed to go because that's your space. Like I'll tell my kids, "This is my space. You don't come into this space until, unless I give you permission." And they'll [the suits] go into your desk, and like I'd have a notebook where I would write down my plans and stuff. It would be for me. It was not the notebook that we had to have available to develop the lesson plan. And they were poking through my journal, and that, to me, is like invasion.

Veronica was monitored remotely through technology:

And so it's not like work where you're at an office sitting down working, it's based on, we have like a secure VPN, so when we log into that, that's how the hours are counted. So, if we had a 10-hour event, we add that into the portal, so it's 10 hours plus the work that we did to create the event in the portal. We don't clock in once we go to the event, so then we recap in the portal—how long did the event last, and we just type in 10 hours, and that's how they count our hours. All the work we do in the portal, and then plus the work we do in the field, we just put that in the portal so it adds up.

Tim's employer, the U.S. Army, began monitoring people when coworkers did not return from appointments when expected, instead taking extra time to escape the demands of their work:

For one, they didn't want us to go. If you had a family issue, then they wouldn't want it to be every day. On a case by case basis, you've got to talk to the right people. I had to talk to the right people about my situation. For the most part, they don't want nobody leaving. They just want you to be on a schedule. Even like going to the doctor, if you had an appointment or something. People would not even come back to work. They started making us sign out and sign back in because people wouldn't come back to work because people were tired. We was just all tired, man. It was crazy.

Surveillance can also be viewed positively. Jean was monitored through the special designation her project received based on the multimillion dollar revenue it represented for her firm. Jean felt this surveillance generated helpful career benefits:

We have this thing called high profile projects, usually projects got high profile when there was something wrong. Well, New York was seen as a high profile project when we started the procurement because Millenial doesn't specifically sell software. We're one of the only parts of the organization that our main product is selling software...The whole rest of our organization had brought in revenue that year of about five and a half million dollars and this contract made \$10 million. So it was a totally different scale, a totally different type of client, the contract was completely different, so it was totally different...Our product became high profile before it was even a project, so we didn't have a chance to mess up before we had weekly meetings with the CEO and the CFO of how our project was going.

And what ended up happening, it was very stressful and painful thinking you had to be prepared to talk to the CEO of the company about how our particular project was going. However, it also opened doors to us to get support from the corporate level that we would never have gotten if we didn't have that high profile project designation. We wouldn't have had the CEO watching, looking in on us, so you know, we also got to know the CEO, which was another benefit and he gets to know you.

CONCLUSION: DAWKINS' SELFISH GENE IN ORGANIZATIONS TODAY

Overall, codes in this set reflect the variety of factors that symbolize and reinforce The Selfish System, as experienced by participants across a variety of job types, hierarchical levels, and industries. Some of these examples represent discrete events while others represent processes and or relationships that played out over a longer period

of time. Additionally, a single experience may represent one or more of the Selfish System factors, indicating that members assign complex layers of meaning to the organization's actions as these individuals attempt to make sense of and act within their work environments. Participants also interpret the presence of these factors as a reflection of the degree to which the organization values them and the work they do in their professional roles on behalf of the organization. The implicit and explicit messages received from members of organizational leadership were often cited as a particularly noteworthy factor in participants' sensemaking regarding what The Selfish System valued most.

In this way, The Selfish System described in this chapter operates in the same way as Dawkins' (1976) selfish gene, a gene which ensures the survival of the system. Dawkins describes the power of the selfish gene and its skill at using individual bodies to ensure its long-term survival:

Genes are immortal...That means the difference between a successful gene and an unsuccessful gene really matters...The genes that make it through are good at it. And "good at it" means building bodies, good at controlling the processes of embryology to make bodies which have what it takes to preserve those genes and pass them on. I use the phrase "the survival machine" —the body, an individual, is a survival machine.

That's by far the most powerful way for interpreting what an individual organism is. An individual organism is a throw-away survival machine for the self-replicating coded information which it contains, and the fate of that coded information is crucially bound up with the fate of the body in which it sits. If the body in which it sits dies before reproducing, then that coded information is not going to go on to the next generation and the next.... The genes that are in the world today, distributed as they are in the bodies of millions different species, are here today because they are good at what they did in the past. They've come through literally an unbroken line of successful ancestors, where unsuccessful non-ancestors have been littered by the wayside.

In his book, Dawkins (1976) discusses several processes used by the selfish gene in order to survive. One such process is implemented through hygiene behaviors performed by gene-carrying members. Hygiene behaviors cleanse the system of inferior genes. Dawkins uses the example of how adult honeybees have a genetic ability to identify and pull the protective cap off diseased honeybee larva, then drag the larvae out of the hive. Current members of the hive engage in this particular hygiene routine because diseased larvae represent a threat to the hive, given that afflicted bees would not be able to fulfill the work duties expected of hive members, and if they reproduce, could threaten the longer-term survival of the hive.

After purposefully breeding three different groups of hybrid honeybees that did not possess the full genetic code for the hygiene process described above, researcher W.C. Rothenbuhler found that one group of the hybrid bees still fulfilled the hygiene routine, a second group exhibited no hygiene behaviors, and the third group did half of the hygiene routine. The third group removed the cap on the diseased larvae but did not pull the diseased larvae out of the hive. However, after Rothenbuhler uncapped the diseased larvae himself, the third group of bees did proceed to remove the larvae from the hive. This action by group three confirmed they were missing only one of the two required genes needed to complete the full hygiene routine (i.e., the gene related to recognizing and uncapping diseased larvae). This finding potentially indicated that possessing only one of the required genes could not guarantee completion of the hygiene routine.

An alternative interpretation by Hawkins (1976) is that even without both of the required genes the hygiene process can be *learned*, which may explain why the group of hybrid bees disposed of the larvae once the researcher removed the cap, even though this group of bees was missing one of the required genes. A third alternative, which Dawkins

did not describe, is that intervention by an outsider (the researcher) represents the role potential for third party to ensure the continued vitality of the system. That is, if members of the system are not fulfilling their responsibilities someone else can intervene—or example, Human Resources may step in to clean up a “problem” within an employee population.

Dawkins uses another example to describe how those with power can exercise their influence to ensure the ongoing predictability of the system and their power within it. He describes how many small fish and shrimp survive in the ocean by cleaning the fins and gills of larger fish. The smaller fish have stripe patterns and dancing displays that indicate their status as “cleaners” to the larger fish (Dawkins, 1976). These “stripy dancers,” as Dawkins refer to them, then clean the fins and gills of the much larger fish—who could easily eat them, but do not. This relationship, which Dawkins terms *reciprocal altruism*, benefits both the smaller and the larger fish. The small fish reap a steady food supply from the particles cleaned off the larger fish, while the larger fish are cleansed of a potential longer-term health issue. However, one problem does exist in this relationship. Intruders will sometimes play the role of “stripy dancers,” tricking the larger fish into thinking they are a cleaner and then taking a bite out of the larger fish. These violators will be left behind by the larger fish, while those who clean as expected—ie, those who please the system—will be allowed to remain. Additionally, over time the larger fish know where they can go to find trustworthy strip dancers (or use discipline strategies to punish violators and ensure expected behaviors among the rest of the population), just as organizations learn where to go to recruit the types of workers who will be loyal servants to the organization, avoiding those who are less predictable or even overtly threatening to the predictability of the existing system.

To this point, Dawkins (1976) also notes that identifying potential threats to the system requires not only observations across individuals within the system (ie, members who appear to be playing along and those who are not), but also an awareness of what is happening *within* individual bodies, where changes to gene pool begin. Specific to organizational exit, this means organizations need to be conscious of the sensemaking and related changes occurring within individuals based on one's observations and experiences within the organizational environment. Being aware of these intrapersonal changes is necessary for organizations because these individual changes in perception represent a threat to the organization, if a valued employee decides to exit and/or spread their new interpretations and responses into the broader system. Perversely, an exit also means the removal of a threat to organizational predictability (although an exit by one can trigger questions and exit considerations among other members, representing yet another threat to the system.)

Building on Dawkins' insights about the relationship between an organization's selfish gene and the actions of its members, the following chapters will detail hygiene routines embodied by the actions of several groups of organizational members, including leaders, managers and coworkers. Findings will illustrate that each of these groups display a variety of hygiene behaviors designed to discipline deviance and create replicas of themselves, with the goal of ensuring the survival of the system that supports them. The next chapter will begin by exploring the role of organizational leaders in communicating and enforcing the expectations of the Selfish System.

Chapter 6: Leadership that Leads to Exit

Leaders play a crucial role in the Selfish System. By offering presence and support, leaders help members make sense of and successfully navigate the Selfish System, serving as an insightful guide regarding assimilation processes. Conversely, through absence and/or abuse, leaders' actions solidify the Selfish System, isolating members as they struggle to assimilate into various teams, departments and social networks across the organization. Unfortunately, current organizational communication and management literature possess an infrequently acknowledged management bias, limiting our understanding of the specific ways members feel abused and isolated (Lutgen-Sandvik & Sypher, 2009). Many studies have examined the self-censoring communication organizational members choose based on their experiences with the organization, without fully accounting for the organizational power dynamics embodied by leaders that contribute to one's choice to express voice (Detert & Burris, 2007; Caldwell & Canuto-Carranco, 2010), raise ethical issues (Bisel & Kramer, 2014; Bisel, Kelley, Ploeger, & Messersmith, 2011), remain silent (Van Dyne et al., 2003), or engage in job neglect (Travis, Gomez & Barak, 2011). These power dynamics are manifested in specific leader communication behaviors observed or directly experienced by members, sending a powerful message that employee voice is not welcome. While employees have agency, organizations have power and use this power directly and indirectly to minimize threats to organizational predictability.

Three leadership communication behaviors emerged as central to the member sensemaking process within the Selfish System: Breaking Promises, Inauthentic Cheerleading, and Pulling Rank. Together, these behaviors represent "anti-leadership," communication that demonstrates a lack of focus on what is best for the organization and

its people. However, leaders were not only negative and disempowering for members, participants also shared many examples of individual leaders who embodied a people focus that was vital to helping them make sense of and navigate an otherwise challenging organizational environment. These positive communication behaviors included: Encouraging Me, Feeling Known, Going to Bat for Me, Investing in Me, and Making Personal Time for Me. As the findings reported in this section will illustrate, leaders play a powerful role in enacting organizational power and enforcing organizational culture.

ANTI-LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR #1: BREAKING PROMISES

Comments in this code represent the dimensions of expectation violation that occur between the anticipatory organizational socialization through the encounter stage. These violations are experienced when one's hope for something different and—an initial trust in the organization and its leadership—are violated. Codes within Breaking Promises include, Experiencing Favoritism, Powerful Persuader, Seeing Leader Break the Rules, Stuck in His Old Ways, Turning a Blind Eye.

The experiences of Sally, a 66-year old building services coordinator, illustrate many dimensions of broken promises. During the interview process, Sally's director told her about the career benefits of taking on "special projects" to be assigned by her manager, yet once on the job this promise was quickly broken:

They said there were projects available and people that volunteered to take on more projects would be, when it came for raises, compensated - that they would be recognized, put it that way. And within a month of when I was hired, there was a memo put out by the same person that interviewed me that there would be no raises that year. But he did have a fund that he was given that he was going to use to reward people that went 'above and beyond.' I came to find that the person that got a raise — I know of only one person that got a raise — was the one that gave me such a hard time with her threatening personality. She was one that got a raise —and she had told him she would not take on any extra work. I mean, she just flat out and said, 'Not happening.

Sally's experience reflects multiple dimensions of broken leadership promises: a) the violation of the excitement one associates with the implicit promise represented by a new job, b) violation of an explicit early promise offered by someone in a position of authority, c) seeing a coworker who clearly violated the stated requirements be financially rewarded, and d) seeing a problematic coworker's behavior – in this example, abusive treatment of a coworker and refusal to do work – seemingly go unrecognized and unpunished.

Experiencing Favoritism

This code refers to specific situations in which participants perceived others were granted opportunities on factors other than their job-related skills or competencies. Samantha, a White consultant in her mid-20s, saw another new hire get numerous professional development and mentoring opportunities, despite producing poor quality work—while she herself struggled to get staffed on projects. She was initially confused why this was happening:

I did mention it once or twice to the girls that I was having lunch with that I didn't understand why this kid was getting all this work, and not seemingly doing it to the expectations of Ron (leader) or the other team members. And yet, I'm sitting here twiddling my thumbs.

They told me that Ron liked to pick a male project and that's his thing. He picks a project, like a person, to be his project. And it's always a male. This is his project now. There were a few times when I had to pick up this guy's slack as the project went on...He was horrible with Excel. And instead of asking questions, he would just give us information and say it was right. Then I would look at it and it would have glaring errors. I would fix it and advise him and show him all of my spreadsheets and offer to set up a meeting if he ever wanted to see my work.

Ron would always say, "So, you know, I heard that you had to pick up the slack on this one. But this kid, I'd bank on his name. He takes feedback really well and I'm sure he's going to make a meeting with you to go over what you did. I'm sure you'll be able to teach him and he'll be able to pick up on it real quick. He takes feedback really well." I was just like, "Okay." But that kind of thing, in

such a small company, those impressions of people in management, when there's only three people in management—I just think those kind of biases are magnified.

Powerful Persuader

This code refers to a leader who is exceptionally skilled at communicating the organization's espoused values, serving to establish or strengthen members' sense of identification with the organization. While initially beneficial to the organization, it sets the stage for Broken Promises when individual leaders' choices and actions do not reflect those espoused values. The perception of Broken Promises is especially likely when leaders blatantly act in ways that violate the values the individual leader espouses. Several participants noted observing leadership behaviors they found abusive, unethical or otherwise detrimental to the organization go unacknowledged.

Emily shared the story of the leader who proudly called herself “the velvet hammer,” taking pride in her ability to fire individuals she felt were not loyal to her vision for the organization. This new local leader espoused values much different than those of the company founder, who Emily had felt inspired by when she heard him speak at a company event just months before. She contrasted her observations of the velvet hammer with what had first inspired her to join the organization:

I was working for the company when they acquired the absolute largest contract that a federal agency had ever awarded to a private company. It was a ten-year, all-inclusive, consolidation of IT at the Department of Education. And it was awarded to Plunkett Solutions. The morale of our sales team, and the morale of the company at large, was just huge.

We were invited by Rich Plunkett himself to come—though we were in D.C., the company was based out of Houston, Texas—to fly to Houston for a big celebration. For Rich Plunkett to remind us that while this means big dollars—and a lot of the sales people make huge commissions I didn't – that this [contract] reinforced his desire for business and education to link up for the betterment of society. I've always felt that way. I came to that job with that orientation.

Emily's experience illustrates how a broken implicit promise relevant to one's work-related personal values can be an especially powerful trigger for exit-related sensemaking. Noticing the difference between implicit (and explicit) leadership messages and behaviors that violated those promises was a crucial trigger for exit-related sensemaking.

Seeing Leader Break the Rules

This code refers to examples of seeing leaders break organizational rules, violate policies, or otherwise fail to meet the standards for their position without being held accountable by the organization. Melanie, a junior high teacher for a small school district in Wyoming, and her colleagues even took action to notify organizational leadership about blatant financial and ethics violations her school principal was committing. Their warning was dismissed by the school board:

He ordered a secretary to stop paying the health insurance premiums, so teachers were losing their health insurance through the school. And we tried to go to the school board and the school board was like, "No, everything is fine." And they didn't do anything about him until the federal government filed a lien against the school because we hadn't been paying taxes. And at that point, we were what—fourth quarter—and they fired him and put in an interim for the remainder of the year.

Tim, a young military private, tried to personally hold his commanding officer accountable when she failed to attend his unit's field training:

We was out there for two weeks. [She] didn't even go out there, didn't even see what the place looked like. So the whole unit is in the field, and my NCO is nowhere to be found, and I don't know where she at. I don't know what she's doing. I called her because I had a question, and I woke her up. It was during the daytime, so I thought it was kind of funny. That's what I'm saying, you had to hold them accountable. I'm not going to sit there and be like, "Hey, you should have did this and did that." But like I said, I use tact when I go about that.

Stuck in His Old Ways

This code refers to situations where an individual thought there would be opportunities to introduce new ideas and affect change through their role, only to experience resistance or avoidance from the leader. Joe, a young sales professional for a small family-owned travel business realized the owner was not interested in growing the business:

Working there for even longer, I just got to see that the two bosses, the father and son, really did control the company and they really didn't want the input that we thought we were going to be able to give. I thought I was going to be able to give. It wasn't quite as warranted as I thought it would be.

Marty, senior vice president of supply chain for a global clothing importer, experienced similar resistance, even after changes he initially implemented generated significant financial gains for the company.

[The owner/CEO would say,] "Well, if we're gonna do it, let's just not put a lot out there" and then our service level wouldn't be up to the expectation of our customer, so it was an ongoing struggle for several years, initially. He just didn't want to commit the assets to service the business. The conversation would go [I would say,] "If you want to do the business, which is the reason I'm here, which is the reason you brought me in, you want to grow your business, you want to do business with these major retailers that you've not done business with before, you've got to trust me. This is the way everybody does it. This is the demand in place on their suppliers. These are the things we have to do."

Turning a Blind Eye

This code refers to examples of leaders overtly turning a blind eye to problematic behaviors in the organization, even when a member provides important information directly to the leader. Sam, a young former college student who dropped out of college to pursue a promising career opportunity with a rapidly growing driver education school, took pride in the fact that his new boss put him in a managerial position and asked him to

report back about issues Sam observed on the job. However, he was disappointed when the owner responded to his feedback with excuses and justifications:

I would just let him know what's going on, and he asked that of me. He requested that of me. He goes, "I'm sticking you in this office because I want you to be able to tell me what's going on because I want to know how we can improve this company and make it better." I took that personally. I was like, okay. He told me to do this, so I'm going to tell him. Whether he took it or not is another thing. I would tell him, sometimes like, "Oh yeah, right now it's not the best. This is what's going on." He's like, "Yeah. Well, that's just how they are. It'll blow over." So it was more of like it'll blow over was the response that I got most of the time, and so nothing really happened until it actually had to happen, that kind of a thing.

Similar in-group favoritism was experienced by John, an African American factory worker in his early 50s working in a canning factory in southern Illinois. John was initially selected as a shift leader, but soon found himself falling behind the capabilities expected of him because his White peer, Jeff, who was supposed to be training him, was refusing to do so. John raised his concerns to his supervisor, who scheduled a meeting with the plant manager and John—but not Jeff—to discuss the situation.

I said, "How comes he's not here?" They didn't want to confront him actually. This guy was very good and knew his stuff very well. So, to make a long story short, they did come up with some solutions that—I guess it's like a high documentation where this guy was supposed to be held accountable for training and they wanted to see exactly what was going on.

Well, they found out that he wasn't doing what he (Jeff) was supposed to do. But he still refused to do it. And nothing was done to him about it really. Bruce (plant manager) never found out. By that time, I had become so fed up with that type of system—it wasn't Bruce. It wasn't Bruce at all. I think Bruce would have fired him if he had really found out what was really going on. But by that time, I had gotten fed up and had decided this wasn't the best place for me anyway.

John surmised that his exclusion, and leadership's lack of follow through, was largely based on his own role as an outsider, both due to the pre-existing friendships among his coworkers, and his racial difference as the only African American working in the plant. As John's experience illustrates, favoritism is displayed not only towards certain individuals, but also towards certain groups. The disciplinary process, and broader culture of the organization, operated around this group boundary, further enforcing it and signaling to John that his colleagues—and the organization he worked for—would work to keep him as an outsider, a fact eventually directly communicated to John by Jeff himself:

It's really weird. Jeff [team leader/supervisor] is the type of guy—you liked him and he would talk to you and treat you well on one level. But if it came to anything to do with power or position or authority or something like that, he'd treat you like crap. And one day, we were working. I was complaining about training and stuff like that. He said, "Well, John, I'm just going to tell you, man. Nobody really gives a damn what happens to you around here."

I just looked at him like he was crazy. "What did you say?"

He said, "Nobody really gives a damn around here."

ANTI-LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR #2: INAUTHENTIC CHEERLEADING

Inauthentic cheerleading is an in vivo code, and is represented by a leader who is only concerned with making things "look good on paper" and enjoying the reputational and material perks of leadership without taking action to ensure the operational success of the organization and its members. For Alisa, a Hispanic grade school teacher in a large urban district in a school with a high proportion of low income, academically underprepared students, the issue was her principal's lack of engagement and support related to instructional planning:

She was a very nice lady, but I really see her kind of like a cheerleader, because she'll smile and this and that, and she does cutesy things and things that are really

about appearances—like the bulletin boards have to be nice and all that. What I realized about her, though, is that she wasn't an instructional leader. She was more like a manager, and not even that great of a manager to begin with, and at a school, especially a school like ours, we really needed an instructional leader. Someone who can help us—and that also encompasses handling behavior [issues in the classroom] —to help us with teaching...

She knows that we have our issues. She would sometimes, we would have a friendship element of how to deal with behavioral issues, but it was never helpful. It was never helpful...It's like she didn't understand, and she should have understood. If you're in that position that you're principal, you should understand what you're doing and what the reality is for the teachers. Because to be a principal, you have to have been a teacher for a certain number of years, you know? That just boggled my mind.

Individual codes in this set include: Didn't Know Me, Ego Gets in the Way, Just Going Through the Motions, Looking for a Rainbow, Not Trying Hard Enough for Me, Questioning Leadership Competence, and Receiving Backhanded Compliment.

Didn't Know Me

This code refers to sensing that a leader has no idea who you are, the credentials you have, and/or what value you add to the company. Emily, a 23-year old sales assistant, was made to feel invisible by her division's new leader.

She didn't even take the time to get to know the people who were there. Maybe it was her edict from above, but it was very clear that she was there to clear house. Whoever Jim (previous leader) had hired, she was going to vet them to see if she wanted to work with them and [if not] they were out the door. But she did it in such a terrible way. She never got to know anyone. She didn't ask for anyone's credentials or resumes or background. I found out later that she thought I was five years younger than I was. She just never took the time to get to know me. She didn't know I had a Master's Degree. She didn't even know that I had worked for the federal government and that was the expertise that I had.

Ego Gets in the Way

This code refers to leaders whose egos prevented them from engaging their leadership role in a positive way. Examples of this problematic behavior include leaders

who flew into a rage when they received negative feedback, leaders engaged in battle for control with other leaders, leaders who pursued a business decision past the time it was proven to be a flop, and leaders who withdrew from interacting with subject matter experts.

For Alyssa, a 40-year old corporate communication professional with a doctoral degree in her field, her leader's ego came to a head during her annual performance review. During this conversation, her leader berated her for not speaking up about communication issues on the team:

In my evaluation, she said I needed to work harder to be part of the team. That was one of my goals for the upcoming year, that I needed to make a better effort to be a part of the team and get along with everybody. I asked her, "Am I'm not getting along with people?" And she said, "No, but I just get the sense that you feel like you really don't fit in." I said, "That's true."

She went from zero to irate in about four seconds. She just went ape... She said, "Well if you were having a problem fitting in, why didn't you come talk to me instead of stewing on something for a while," because she went and got angry so quickly. "And if you had been more in communication with me and telling me what it is that was upsetting you, I would've known and I would've...."

Wow. Okay. And she just really got very, very defensive very quickly. She said, "I would've changed—if you had told me, I would have changed everybody's seats around if you told me it's a problem that you weren't fitting in and that you were feeling like you needed help fitting in with everybody else."

I was like, "I didn't say that." I said, "I think on a scale from 1 to 10, probably about 3 in a level of my concern about this." Then she just kind of backed off a little bit. She was upset about some things and was using them as her entrée into her frustration or something. It was a very, very uncomfortable and very awkward situation because I think we being adult employees, to [think you can] motivate people talk to with each other more is very patronizing and very insulting.

Just Going Through the Motions

This code refers to a leader that is focused on getting what s/he is comfortable with, rather than doing what actually needs to be done as a leader. For Andie, the chief

marketing office for a small health food company going through a merger, she realized that her CEO had lost her focus on the business after the company received a large infusion of cash:

During that process, because we had some money in the bank—the \$500,000 in the bank—there were not financial issues. And so the CEO began, instead of really devoting her time to negotiating this merger, she began, I believe, really feeling like she was entitled to taking some time off. It was a time where she became distant when the business probably needed her more than ever. That's when my feelings started changing.

Q: And, what did you begin feeling specifically?

I began feeling like I needed to do everything in my power to make this merger happen. I probably worked harder than I ever had in the course of that company. I began feeling a little bit desperate. Desperate to try to make this merger happen no matter what it took, no matter that hours it took for me to work, no matter the resources that we had to put into it. I started feeling desperate at that time.

The CEO's lack of leadership made Andie feel like it was her responsibility to make the merger to happen, both for the good of the company and to ensure that her own intense work leading up to the merger resulted in the outcome she had worked so hard to achieve. In the end, however, in large part due to their questioning of the CEO's commitment to lead, the leaders of the acquiring company pulled out of the deal.

For Nora, an accountant for a small family-owned, yacht-building business, the son of the company's owner—who took the lead over day-to-day operations of the firm as his father entered his 80's—viewed her as something other than the credentialed accounting professional capable of much more:

It was an ongoing struggle. I give him the financials and he'll say, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I know, I know." But he doesn't know. We had this conflict about certain things for quite a few years and I just gave up. Here I am. I am a resource that you don't even understand that you have. The skills that I have, a resource that you can tap into. You don't even understand. You're not even sophisticated to understand what skills I bring to the table and what you could utilize me for.

You don't even know. And you don't even want to know. So I just come in and basically do what I want to do until he says, "Okay, take care of this."

Looking for a Rainbow

This code refers to assessment that a leader has unrealistic expectations for their business. Nora, the accountant with a Master's degree who had been with her company for over 15 years, highlighted the overly optimistic outlook her company's owner and his son had for their business:

They've got a lot of debt, they keep pouring more money in, thinking there's going to be a rainbow somewhere. That somehow, something magic is going to fall out of the sky. Because that's how they operate. They're very optimistic...They would go into the ground with this thing rather than settle up and figure out and cut their losses. I have no idea how long they'll stay in business—maybe a miracle will fall out of the sky, [they are] just constantly looking for them.

Not Trying Hard Enough for Me

This code refers to feeling like a leader's position gave them the power and influence to make a difference in some meaningful way regarding the individual's workload or outcomes, yet the leader chose to do nothing—or waited until a crisis had occurred. Alexis, a 41-year old senior manager for a Big Four consulting firm, was irritated that her leader, the firm's Chief Learning Officer, waited until Alexis had submitted her two-week notice before acknowledging the value of her contributions and offering to reduce her excessive workload:

She didn't [ever] pull us aside and say, "Hey, I just want to personally say thank you for all the work that you've done," or, "Hey, I know this is tough. What can I personally do to help make things better for you or make things easier for you?" And I think just that reach-out and that acknowledgement of, "Hey, I know you're billing X number of hours, and because of the way you work, I know you're probably churning and burning. The two hours that you sleep, I know you're probably thinking about XYZ that you've got going on as well." That just didn't

come. And so that was probably the biggest element I think that would have helped. Because she definitely stood at attention when I said I was leaving.

Q: And how'd that make you feel?

A little bit surprised. I was surprised that she so quickly offered an alternative. She did say—which is almost like turning the knife, which was, “You should’ve come to me.” “Yeah, really? Really, Grandma? You’re going to open your arms to me and give me a big hug and say, “That’s great. Now buck up, camper?” No. She wasn’t doing those things at this point, right? [Now] the threat is already there. The letter’s in her hand.

Questioning Leadership Competence

This code refers to making observations, or having interactions with a leader that specifically causes you to question whether or not the individual is competent to lead effectively. For Mary, a 32-year old record-setting regional sales manager, her director’s lack of knowledge related to how to effectively schedule time while visiting clients in the field left her questioning the director’s ability to lead:

Out of the two years that she was there, I think she made only one or two trips in the field, and the time that I did ask her to travel with me — a lot of times, she got all frustrated because she goes, “Well, I don’t understand how you can make your plans and travel and go from here to here to here and there and how you can figure out your time and where you need to be with all the traffic.” And I said, “Well, we take that into consideration. You take out a map and you pull everything out, and you know where you’re going to go. You pretty much go around in a circle. I start from one spot. I go around and you end up where you started, and you fly out back home.”

Q: And what did she say?

She was like, “Well, I tried that one time in California. That just did not work out.” And I said, “Well, you have to take into consideration California is not like Buffalo [home office location]. Traffic is four times as much. It’s going to take you an hour and a half to get somewhere, where usually it would take you half an hour. So you need to put that into consideration and the times that you’re traveling as well, and you need to see the distance from one customer to the other.” And then she was like, “Well, I just couldn’t do it, and I just call over the phone, so that’s how you need to do it.” I said, “Okay.”

Receiving a Backhanded Compliment

This code refers to direct comments from leaders that both complement and question your professional abilities. For Mary, the high-performing regional sales manager, the backhanded compliment came when the company president shared his surprise at her consistently exceptional level of performance:

There was one time, actually, when I did talk to the president of the company — and that was after I got promoted as a regional sales manager, and I increased my sales [even more], and they were very, very, very happy. He did say, “You know what, I raised your goals so many times. I’ve raised the bar for you thinking that you wouldn’t be able to do it.” He said, “Every time I did it, you blew it out of the water.” He said, “So, whatever you’re doing, just keep on doing it.”

Q: Wow, and how did that make you feel that he said that to you?

Two things. It made me feel good in a way that I was like, you know what, I told you I could prove you’re wrong, and I worked hard for it, and you see it, so there’s no reason for any promotion or anything else that I want that you should be hesitant to do, because I’ve been with you for so long and worked hard. But at the same time, it made me feel like, okay, because I’m young and you didn’t believe me, I had to prove myself that much harder. At the same time, I kind of felt like they saw that I worked hard. It almost felt like they kind of, I don’t know, used me in a way, you know?

ANTI-LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR #3: PULLING RANK

This axial code represents the multitude of ways leaders signal their own power while making their employees feel insignificant, untrustworthy, or simply incompetent. These negative leadership behaviors also make employees feel unsure of themselves or their environment. Codes in this set include: Being Accused, Being Blindsided, Changing the Rules, Feeling Invisible, Just Get it Done, Invading My Space, Looking Out for Their Own, Questioning My Competence, Taking Credit for My Work, and Undermining My Authority.

Being Accused

This code refers to examples of a leader questioning one's personal or and/or professional integrity. Peter, the new manager of a popular music venue, was accused by his regional leader of stealing \$1200 that disappeared from the bar's safe the night after several of the company's executives spent the evening drinking and partying at the venue.

Long story short, Texas Restaurants, Inc. tells me—and now at this time I have an assistant manager—they say, “All right. There's 1,200 bucks missing. You guys have to split it. I said, “I'm not going to split it. I didn't take the money. I'm not going to be penalized for that.” So they were like, “Well, take it out of everybody's tips.” I said, “I'm not going to take it out of everyone's tips. A, half these people just worked here because of [music festival]. I've already given them the tips. I can't say, “Hey, sorry, I've got to take some tips back.”

It was this long huge thing, and I had a lawyer friend in town. I got him on the phone. And they said, “Well, if you guys don't split the money, someone's going to get fired.” So I went in there and said, “All right, you can fire me then, because I didn't take your money, and I'm not going to eat it because somehow there's exactly \$1,200 missing from the safe.”

Being Blindsided

This code refers to situations in which an employee is shocked when: a) the organization communicates a significant change without any type of warning or explanation, b) team members of the company overall fail to follow through on a commitment to the individual, or c) the organization takes direct action against the employee herself. For Katie, the first form of being blindsided occurred when she arrived to work to see the banner of another company hanging in the lobby and employees wearing shirts with another company's logo welcoming her to her “new” company after a seemingly sudden acquisition by a much larger national firm.

Alison, a school psychologist, experienced the second form of Being Blindsided when she visited an assistant principal to check on the status of a special education plan the student's care team had created for a student. The assistant principal informed her the

committee had changed the plan after the students' parents called to request special education testing for the student. Against her professional judgment, Alisa was then required to test the student, who did not end up qualifying for special education services, just as Alison had expected.

Chloe, a 22-year old physical therapist in her first full-time job, spoke to Human Resources about pressure she was receiving from her manager to work for a client without having a signed contract in place with the client, which meant she did not have liability insurance coverage. She expected the next meeting—with that same HR representative and her manager—to be focused on resolving the situation, and was shocked by how the organization cast her out:

They were really mad at me and basically I wasn't being a team player is what they told me. Then they told me that I had a low work ethic – they actually had a meeting with me and my supervisor and Human Resources where I got reprimanded and was told that I didn't work hard anymore and I wasn't a team player. They felt like they couldn't depend on me. And that there, I was just stunned. I didn't know what to say. I went in there and I was like, "I feel like something's not right, I feel like they're mad at me."

Talking to Human Resources, I was like, "They are snapping at me and I don't understand what I'm doing wrong. I feel like they're not happy with me and I would just like to be on the same page." And I was thinking, we're going to go in there [follow-up meeting with Chloe's manager and this HR representative], we're going to get a couple of things out...[instead] I walked in there and got completely blindsided. And Human Resources already knew about it. I was like, "You told me you were on my side. You were not on my side in there." She's like, "Well if that's how it is." [I thought] "This is not how it is."...I just can't even respond to it, I was so hurt and upset and told, "That's not at all how it is."

Changing the Rules

This code refers to instances where a leader changes policies governing the employees' day-to-day work responsibilities—and often, financial compensation structure—for the explicit purpose of extracting more value out from the employee's

work. Marty, the senior vice president of supply chain for an international clothing importer, explained how the company owner would constantly increase the revenue target required for him to receive his annual bonus:

Every year I was there would produce a sales increase and profit increase. [But] the profit threshold that we would have to meet to go into the profit share, every year he would just crank it higher and higher until he figured out that, if I set it at a certain level, if they make any bonus at all, I will have made so much money that I won't feel too bad about them making a little bit.

Feeling Invisible

This code refers to instance where employees are made to feel like they are not in the room, that they are talked about rather than with. Jennifer, an administrative assistant for an academic department at a large university, shared the story about a leadership meeting her peer overheard:

They had a meeting over there—like him and some other big guys and there was something wrong with their AC [air conditioning] in the conference room. They had the door propped open. And they're in there talking about privatizing everything and everybody can hear them. And she said, everybody [employees] was walking around going 'Gah.' She said they were such idiots. It never occurred to them that anybody could hear, or, if they did, how it would affect them. It's more like there's people up there and here we are, all the little worker bees. And hello, this is our job, too. People may not have as many job opportunities as these other people do. Just being aware of that, "We're sorry we may have to do this," or whatever like that, and we really hate it and we're really sorry." Have a little empathy.

Just Get It Done!

This code refers to examples of receiving pressure to just do the job the way the leader wants it done, even if this is of lesser quality than the employee feels the task could be done. Examples of this attitude among leaders also include expecting employees to figure things out—and/or assume responsibility for—things that are beyond their stated scope of responsibility or authority. A final version of Just Get It Done reflects a

lack of awareness or lack of caring related to how much time or additional resources a task will realistically require.

Lisa, a young Hispanic advertising specialist working for a large advertising firm in New York City, explained how she was expected to figure out exactly—and only—what her account manager wanted her to write:

I had another boss on that team who asked me to write a brief, which is basically a summarized strategy—a very short strategy. Like one sentence. Or three sentences. Wanted me to write a brief—it might have been the National Bank credit card for college students or something. And I would write it. He already knew what he wanted. So nothing I wrote was right until I wrote exactly what he wanted me to write. And that was (a) painful, (b) a waste of time, and it pissed me off. And it pissed him off, too. Now that time, I actually did tell our regional boss. I think he might have complained or something like that. So I talked to her and said, “Look. I don’t understand. He asked me to do something, but then he already knows what he wants.” She’s like, “Yeah. He’s kind of like that. If he asks again, just give him what he wants.” I’m like, “Okay.” So it was just a waste of my time.

Ivy, a senior manager for a Big Four Consulting firm, shared her experience of being expected by one of the firm’s partners to assume responsibility for approving a legally binding client document, even though she had no credentials or experience reviewing legal documents.

I asked a partner for support reading a legal document and they just told me, “Not enough time for that. You’re a senior manager. Figure it out.” This is legal. Your name is on it. You have, as a partner, liability and you’re saying just fucking deal with it. That’s not right. So I called that out. I said, “Hey, this is inappropriate. Just because I’m a senior manager—I’ve never done this before and you’re just going to let me sort it out? This has kind of significant financial implications if I fuck it up. And you’re okay with that? Okay. Great.”

Looking Out for Their Own

This code refers to leaders who are concerned what is best for their own team—or fellow leaders—rather than the organization as a whole. Tim, a 29-year old African

American Army private, explained how sergeants monitored the workload assigned to their own teams working kitchen duty at the cost of kitchen staff from other units.

For the most part, the people that was in charge of us, because we had a manager of the dining facility, but it seemed like there were too many chiefs and not enough Indians. It was a lot of sergeants and everybody thought they can do what they wanted to do and then we was the lower enlisted [and] would always get the dirty end of the stick, because the higher ups ain't going to take the fall. And that's the culture it was in that DFAC.

But at the same time, they're not really looking out for anybody really, not even their own soldiers because if they're looking out for everybody it would be noticeable, instead of them just trying to look out for their own soldiers which hurts everybody in the end because we only have so many people.

Questioning My Competence

This code refers to messages that directly question the employee's subject matter expertise or general professional competence. Jerry, a 45-year old chief financial officer for an energy start-up recently acquired by an established energy company, repeatedly has his competence questioned by staff of his new parent company.

The accounting team there would undermine our decisions and let people higher up in management say, "These guys don't know what they're doing." The public company had limited exposure to us, but they would get reports internally. And so, internally, they would let people know that perhaps our company didn't know what they were doing. The feedback would come back to us, "Hey, we should perhaps relieve you of some of your duties because our team says you don't know what you're doing." It was—my goodness—I wouldn't say there was a specific time, it was just ongoing, consistently ongoing—power struggles, trying to undermine what we were doing. It was just a constant effort.

Taking Credit for My Work

This code refers to instances of leaders taking direct personal credit for work done by those below them. Lisa, the advertising agency staffer, would be copied on the emails her leader set to the client when Lisa's work was complete.

She would just say, “Oh here’s something that my team worked on.” Or, “Here’s something that I worked on.” Or, “Here’s something that I thought would be a good idea.” I don’t even think she said the word ‘we.’ Or, “Here’s something that I thought would be a good idea. Let us know if you need any refinements.” And she would copy me.

Q: And so how did that make you feel?

Mad. Angry. Mainly pissed off and almost like I was wasting my time.

Undermining My Authority

This code refers to examples of leaders directly undermining the employee’s authority with their own staff members or others the individual is in charge of supervising. For Melanie, a junior high school teacher in a small Wyoming school district, her principal repeatedly undermined her authority with students, and that of other teachers, both inside and outside the classroom.

If you ever had anything come up, or you reprimanded the kid or they didn’t do well on a test, the kids quickly learned that they could go to him and fix things and he would back them up over the teachers. Case in point for that would be a little girl told me to, “Fuck off.” I told her to, “Sit down and shut up,” because that was not appropriate language in my classroom. And I was written up for telling a kid to ‘shut up.’

She went on to tell him—I’m sorry, I get so upset at this – she went on to tell him that I pushed her. And so I’m in the middle of another class. And it’s one of my classes that are really eager to learn and we’re doing a lot. And he walks in, no explanation, doesn’t knock, just walks in and stands there in the middle of my classroom. I was like, “Can I help you with something?” He goes, “My office now.” So now I’ve been undermined in front of 20-some freshman kids with no explanation. “Oooh, principal’s office.” You know, it’s so juvenile, his approach was.

ANTI-LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR #4: INFLICTING ABUSE

This axial code refers to examples of the ways in which an individual and/or the ir coworkers are singled out for abuse by a leader. Codes in this set include: Blaming Me,

Harassing Coworkers, Pressuring Me to Act Unethically, Publicly Shaming Me, Retaliating Against Me and Silencing Me.

Blaming Me

This code refers to examples of being singled out and blamed for speaking up about a problem experienced by the team or organization. It also includes being blamed for problems one is facing in the workplace. Jane, a young waitress and supervisor for a family-owned restaurant chain, was blamed by the owners for problems she allegedly caused by speaking up about managers doing cocaine in the restaurant during business hours and other issues:

I would bring it up to them...I actually tried to fire a couple people because of it and the general manager wouldn't allow me to do that...The owners definitely started to not like me because of how much I wasn't okay with everything that was going on. I was moving their employees around, trying to fire their employees, telling them this is sexual harassment, and it was just irritating to them. I think they would've just rather found another girl, another one of the cashiers that would've just disregarded it and let it happen instead of me who wasn't okay with it.

Melanie, the junior high school teacher from Wyoming, was blamed for the poor student behavior when she asked the principal for help.

His whole purpose is trying to make his job as easy as possible. It's easier to blame the teacher and attack them and belittle them than it is to try to contact parents and say, "Hey, your kid showed up stoned this morning. Completely admitted smoking a bowl before coming to class. And we're concerned this is an issue." If you have that conversation, you make a lot more work for yourself versus if you have a teacher who says, "Hey, so and so's stoned, I think we should do something." And he would say, "Maybe you're just not an interesting teacher and he feels he has to cope another way." Problem solved. Teacher goes away upset. You don't have to deal with the kids and you get to go back to solitaire on the computer.

Harassing Me

This code refers to repeated verbal harassment and threats intended to frustrate and/or intimidate a member who knows something the leader does not want shared with others, particularly those outside the organization. For Jane, the young waitress, several leaders—all males related to one another—threatened her to keep quiet about problematic customer service and illegal activities going on in the restaurant.

He cussed out a customer and they posted about it and he lied to the owners and told them [owners] none of that happened... I told the owners [the truth] and he ended up leaving that day and told his brother what happened and his brother started threatening me, telling me if I said anything that there'd be issues...

Pressuring Me to Act Unethically

This code refers to being directly pressured to act in an unethical manner. Nora, the accounting manager for a family-owned yachting business, was pressured by the owner's son to not pay certain taxes.

I have to report 1099 income to any persons that are non-employees that meet a certain criteria according to the IRS. I have to send them a 1099. I have to collect their social security and tax ID number and then I send them a 1099 at the end of the year. Well, he's constantly trying to get me to not obey that rule in order to avoid taxes for other people. We constantly have fights over this. We had more fights in the beginning, but he knew that at some point in time, that I wasn't budging on that. So he's given me less and less problems with that particular area. But there's this constant kind of battle of me forcing the ethical issues to him and confronting that with him.

Other examples of being pressured to act unethically include corporate director Rebecca being pressured by her leader to give one of her employees an unfairly harsh review so that the leader could justify firing him, restaurant supervisor Jane being pressured by restaurant owners to keep silent about drug use and sexual harassment occurring in the restaurant, and bar manager Peter being pressured by an executive to make employees pay back their tips in order to recoup missing money, when Peter

strongly suspected that one of the executives had actually stolen the money from a locked safe inside the bar.

Public Shaming

This code refers to being called out in front of their employees regarding the quality of your work or other issues the leader deems problematic. Mary, a sales manager, recalls being shamed for the amount of commissions she earned for consistently exceeding her sales targets.

It was one of those things where, okay, they want us to work. They want us to sell products, but when we start making too much money, that was just no good...Especially when the CFO made a comment [during a meeting], "Sales people don't work hard enough, but they make too much money. They don't deserve to make that much money." And we're like, "Okay, well, if it wasn't for us, you really wouldn't have a job."

For Melanie, her principal frequently shamed teachers for speaking up about concerns during staff meetings:

One of the teachers in one of the meetings tried to say, "This is not the way to run a school." And he [principal] chewed her out in front of everybody. And then in subsequent meetings, quoted her from that former meeting. Some of you think, "Blah, blah, blah." It was very hostile.

Jacob, an accounting manager for a large investment firm, hearing a senior leader publicly insult his entire business function.

Dr. Fred Cohen, a principal, who was the head of our bio-tech funds came to Chicago to work on some stuff and took some of our fund managers out to dinner at a nice restaurant where they entertain when somebody gets to town. He said, "You guys do a great job, but you're not worth much to this company because you don't add any revenue." That is a direct quote.

Retaliating

This code refers to actions taken by a leader in response to posing a real or perceived threat to existing policies or processes. Joe was made to work extra hours to “make up” for the vacation he wanted to take during a time period in which employees were not allowed to take vacation, even though the time period was not a busy one for his particular department. Melanie’s principal wrote her up the day she turned in her resignation letter.

The day I resigned, the day I turned it in, he chose to write me up on some bogus claim that I wasn’t turning in my lesson plans—even though I had a record in my inbox where—because we had to email him lesson plans – and because he had claimed once before that he didn’t get mine, I started doing this whole thing where I’d copy my messages to my own inbox so that I’d have a record. And I could show that record that I had sent them, that they must have been received because everything else had been responded to. And I got wrote up for it. That’s enough. And I left. And now I work in a liquor store.

Sidelining Me

This code refers to examples of leaders preventing employees from receiving new opportunities. Veronica, a marketing manager, discovered that her new leader was excluding her from new project work.

I stopped getting assigned to things. There was no conversation about it. Clients would request me, and he would not tell me or he would give them an excuse to why I couldn’t work on the account. And there was no warning or no conversation about it.

Lisa, the marketing specialist, discovered her boss was taking credit for her work.

I got put onto a team and all the sudden, my superiors were very bureaucratic, whereas before, I was able to do—actually contribute and do things and have a voice. Now, I’m on a team which—I don’t know if it was because of the recession or just her personality. Her personality was very much—you cannot speak until you are at my level. You will do all of this work and give it to me and I will say it’s my work. I take the credit for it. It was just a completely different organization with them in the company.

Surveilling My Space

This code refers to examples of leaders coming into the physical workspace of employees for the explicit purpose of surveillance. Alisa, the grade school teacher, shared the story of the administrators from the central office coming into her classroom to review her classroom materials.

And then also, because we're a Title I school...not only do you have the principal checking in on you, but you have what we call 'the suits.' You have the people from the main office come in and they walk through the room. And it's not just one person. You often have three people in suits, and they come in and they're standing in the back of your room and they're digging through kids' desks, and sometimes you have your own teacher area, where the kids know they're not supposed to go because that's your space. Like I'll tell my kids, "This is my space. You don't come into this space until, unless I give you permission." And they'll [the suits] go into your desk and like, I'd have a notebook where I would write down my plans and stuff. It would be for me. It was not the notebook that we had to have available to develop the lesson plan. And they were like poking through my journal, and that, to me, is like invasion.

ANTI-LEADERSHIP #5: HARMING ORGANIZATION

While the previous axial codes outline the individual experiences and messages received, this axial code highlights leadership behaviors that are harmful to the organization overall. Codes in this set include: Avoiding Action, Avoiding Conflict, Destroying Trust, Disappointing Me as a Leader, Harming the Organization, Making Assumptions, Manipulating Others, Relishing in Power, and Rupturing Relationships.

Avoiding Action

This code refers to leaders who consciously avoid action to address needs or issues faced by the organizations, teams or individual members. Andie, the chief marketing officer of a health food company about to be acquired by a larger organization, she saw the CEO pull away and avoid actions and decisions needed to make the merger successful, which placed even more pressure on Andie:

I started feeling a little bit like this is going to be a problem. But, at that time, we began going through discussions with an affiliated company about a merger. During that process, because we had some money in the bank - the \$500,000 in the bank - there were not financial issues [as there had been previously]. And so the CEO began, instead of really devoting her time to negotiating this merger, she began – I believe really feeling like she was entitled to taking some time off. It was a time where she became distant when the business probably needed her more than ever. And that’s when my feelings started changing.

I began feeling like I needed to do everything in my power to make this merger happen. I probably worked harder than I ever had in the course of that company. And I began feeling a little bit desperate. Desperate to try to make this merger happen no matter what it took, no matter that hours it took for me to work, no matter the resources that we had to put into it. I started feeling desperate at that time.

Avoiding Conflict

This code refers to examples of leaders avoiding conflict with other organizational members. For John, the factory worker whose peer would not provide him the training he needed, John’s supervisor and the plant manager stepped in to train him, rather than confront their subordinate assigned to train John who directly refused to do so:

Rather than make Jeff do it, he had to start training me personally. Bruce made him start training me. So every day, they would get me. Dave started training me. Every day they would get me and Bruce, “I want you to come in here. I want you to take a half hour or an hour and I want you to come in here once or twice a week. We’re going to pick a day. We’re going to schedule it. And you’re going to come in here and I’m going to train you. And then, you’re going to go with Dave—and you pick the time, but I want you to spend at least an hour and half – two hours a week with Dave. He’s going to personally take you around and train you and show you everything.”

That was the end solution. And at that point, I started learning like a sponge, learning everything really quick. Once again, you mean to tell me, the plant manager had to train me, the superintendent over five companies had to train me? And you mean to tell me Dave Smith, the operation manager, had to train me? But they never said anything to Jeff.

Disappointing Me as a Leader

This code refers to feelings of disappointment experienced by the “let down” of realizing a leader is not going to be a people-focused leader. Darren, a marketing manager for a global electronics company, expressed his personal disappointment in his leader, even though it didn’t necessarily lessen his admiration for the company:

This company had a great history and they started—it started in someone’s garage back in the 1950’s and now it’s multi-national. So they have a lot to be proud of, but on the other hand, I think there are so many human factors... You get politics wherever you go, and the company can’t necessarily control one person’s personal hang-ups or insecurities or another person’s drive to be manipulative to make up for their own issues. Those are things that the company can’t control for.

Krissy, a marketing specialist for a direct mail firm, was disappointed that the company’s CEO was allowing other leader such a high degree of control over day-to-day operations, seeming not to notice how poorly they were treating staff, including a number of poorly handled terminations:

The main thing would be for the owner/CEO to actually have put his hands more on the reins and control things more. I mean, he’s 70-something years old, so I’m sure he’s wanting to probably sell the company soon. I’m thinking maybe he’s wanting to pull back and that’s not why he’s so involved in that aspect.

Making Poor Decisions

This code represents examples of when participants felt that a leaders decisions or actions did harm to the operations or potential longer-term viability of the organization. For Andie, the chief marketing officer of a small health food company, she was concerned that her CEO wanted to open a franchise in Albuquerque, New Mexico, hundreds of miles from their home base in New Orleans, Louisiana:

I remember specifically being concerned about being able to service and stay on top of a store that was geographically so far away from us. And it did not make sense to me that we would grant a franchise to someone who we would have to invest so much money in on a regular basis to try to service that location.

Q: Was that something that you attempted to voice the concerns about then?

I did. Absolutely, I did. [Her response was,] “This is the perfect location. It’s Albuquerque, New Mexico. They are into this type of lifestyle,” and so geography was not a concern. The culture of the geography overrode the culture of the company that we were trying to create.

Nora, the accounting manager for a small, family-owned yacht manufacturer, saw a once thriving business brought to the brink of economic collapse based on decisions of the company’s leader:

Well, it concerns me because he’s basically running the company into the ground. We’ve had liquidity problems and there are situations now where he has debts that him and his father had to dip into their own pockets to bail out the company in certain situations, to give money to the company for cash flow purposes. I’ve been there 11 years and I successfully negotiated our line of credit every year. So now, because of some of his mismanagements, our line of credit wasn’t renewed and we owe the bank \$400,000 and we have no prospects of paying it back. There’s a lot of financial mismanagement.

Making Assumptions

This code refers to examples of leaders making uninformed assumptions about what a member’s job requires or the level of work required to be successful and make a meaningful contribution to the company. For Mary, the high-producing sales manager, her company’s CFO told her outright that he did not think she or the other sales representatives deserved the level of commissions they were receiving:

I told him straight out—I was there for a long time, and I was like, “Listen, but we earn that money. There’s times when you guys are done at five or six o’clock and you go home and you go to sleep and you’re done for the day. I’m still on a plane traveling from one state to the other, trying to get my hotel, writing my reports, preparing my presentations and everything else for the following day, and there’s times when I don’t go to bed until midnight, and you’re telling me I don’t work hard enough and I should not be making that money.” And I said, “If it wasn’t for me, you wouldn’t be having half the business that you have.” And he was like, “Well, that’s not what I meant. That’s not what I meant.” And we’re like, “Okay, well, what did you mean?” I was just kind of dealing with that.

Kelly, a state social worker, suggested that leaders of the state welfare agency—who were located in another city across the state—actually come spend time with the staff and clients in her location to gain an understanding of their needs and constraints:

I would encourage the people who are higher up in the food chain to develop a more personal connection with the workers in the field, not just the supervisors, with the actual workers in the field to make them feel more accessible, so that people feel that connection with the agency. I would also very much like it—and I have heard it from several other state employees as well—it would be beneficial if they would actually spend a week doing what we do, meeting with clients, seeing these people, seeing how we interact with them, hearing the stories that they're telling us, and try to find a way to make the system work better.

Relishing in Power

This code refers to examples of leaders whose actions indicated they enjoyed power for power's sake, rather than using it to do what was best for the organization, its people, and its customers. Emily, a young sales assistant, watched her unit's new leader—who proudly called herself “the velvet hammer”—behave ruthlessly to her colleagues, whom Emily considered to be like family:

I just watched the way she treated—I was sort of like a homeless puppy on the doorstep, kind of just ignored, but—it's like I had a function but I was clearly not her big target. Her big targets were the senior people. I felt like she'd get to us later or decide that I had enough institutional knowledge that she needed to keep me, that I wasn't a threat to her. But I watched the way she treated all the senior staff who I cared deeply about and it was ruthless. She was just absolutely ruthless and in many cases, made their departure very personal.

Rebecca, a director at a large global telecommunications company, was told by her boss to give one of her team members a poor performance review because the leader did not like him personally:

They had been butting heads all year because they couldn't get along. And I was just like, “I won't do that.” He said, “You have to do it. And here's what you're

going to write.” And he said, “I want you to put him on a performance plan because I want him out of here.” I was just torn up about it. Because this guy was calling me, telling me—he knew. He had a feeling. He’s like, “I know he doesn’t like me and I don’t know what I’m doing wrong. I don’t like him.” I was in the middle of this.

And I saw both points of view, except it was the way that that person in Washington handled it, in wanting to get rid of him instead of to work with him. It just was so bad. So I called HR actually and I was like, “I don’t feel comfortable doing this. I don’t want to do it. This is what I believe...” I mean, I filled out a whole report and I said, “And I’m leaving this organization. I can’t stay here anymore.” They were like, “No, you should stay.” So I left that organization and moved over to marketing.

Rupturing Relationships

This code refers to leadership actions that destroy previously effective working relationships and ultimately threaten the operational stability of the organization. Andrew, a young catering specialist, witnessed the power struggle between two leaders that contributed to a significant loss of business and then the resultant firing of several tenured wait staff. Once business picked up and new staff were hired, the previous culture of teamwork between servers and cooks no longer existed:

I think it was a lot of the new people’s attitudes. There were several servers that we picked up that were against doing side work or any type of work other than like directly communicating with customers, which was the opposite of the people we had fired, prior to that where everybody was always doing side work. It was slow, so people could help out in the kitchen and people could help break things down for events and for concerts. It quickly became that our servers are directly communicating with the customers and serving tables and that is all they’re doing and there’s nobody else to kind of pick up the slack, so we’ve got to make somebody do it and nobody was happy about doing that. And now people that had stayed from before were angry at the new people because they weren’t helping out and the new people weren’t convinced that they needed to because that wasn’t in their job description.

Samantha, a young consultant, was concerned by how her senior leader's dishonesty was rupturing trust with their client—and upset by the senior leader's behavior towards her as well:

He was in charge of the Knowledge Management program, which is like their bread and butter. But he's old – when I say old, he's probably just 60. And I found him so frustrating. We went to the World Bank and those people are brilliant. And they know they're brilliant. They are going to be cocky about it, but you still have to respect the fact that they are brilliant. And he just BS-ed them for a week straight. And they saw right through it. And I was so frustrated that we can have a more positive presence, and it was just like dumped on me to manage the project even though he was getting all the credit for managing it, and the bonus credit for managing it and everything. That project was kind of like my last job. I was, "This is awesome, that I'm working at the World Bank and that's exciting. But failing at the World Bank isn't of interested to me." And that's how things were going.

PEOPLE-FOCUSED LEADERSHIP

In contrast to the many problematic observations participants noted about leadership communication and behaviors, they also shared instances of leadership behavior that inspired them and made them feel connected to the leader and the organization. For example, Emily's noticing and admiration of her former leader's business knowledge, relationship building skills and his commitment to staff development, highlighted the strong sense of identification she felt with a people-focused leader (and represented a stark sensemaking contrast to her observations of the "velvet hammer"):

My boss, Jim, he was amazing. He's the one that I met and then he just pursued me coming on because I spoke the business language and the education language and had a lot of relationships in the federal government. He created a very close-knit, strong sales team that consisted of area experts, meaning if the company wanted to sell to the Department of Defense, he had someone who had been in the Army or the Navy—that was our salesperson. And he was just really good at relationship management. He didn't look for people who were in marketing or just sales, pure sales. He looked for people who were experts in their area, who

also had good personal skills. And I really admired that about him. I thought he was a strong leader. I thought he was smart and capable. And he promised me, if I hitched my wagon to his star, that he would work really hard at developing my skillset...I saw a true opportunity to grow with them. And quite honestly, thought I could be with the company for a while.

Codes in axial code set include: Encouraging Me, Feeling Known, Going to Bat for Me, Investing in Me, and Making Personal Time for Me.

Encouraging Me

This code includes examples of participants who felt strongly supported and encouraged by organizational leaders in their day-to-day activities and responsibilities. Anne, a special education coordinator, who liked her job but left to stay home with her own two young children, said of her school's leaders:

I've always said when I go back to working, I would definitely go back to working there again, because the people that I worked with – everybody had the same goal of working toward helping families that are in need. It's just very satisfying when you are going to work and you're helping little kids that are having a harder time than most, and families that are having a harder time than most – or at least families that have typically healthy kids. My boss and my supervisors, everybody was extremely supportive. They provided a lot of support if I needed it. But they didn't impose themselves on us unless we asked for help.

Ivy, a senior manager at a big four consulting firm, spoke warmly of a senior leader, and now personal friend, who helped her develop her own leadership skills:

Fred was just one of those really good people and really supportive with me and my decisions in how I led people. Like the good, in terms of someone who knows how to develop other leaders. He thought about it consciously. It didn't just happen. I had a situation where I was managing someone who had just started with Big Time Consulting and came from Stanford. So very – I would say – book-learned, whereas I'm more practical.

I had to spend a lot of time teaching her the basics of how to be a good consultant. It took a lot of patience. It was one of those things where he helped me sort of gauge when I should let her sink or swim. He also helped me deliver tough messages because not everything is sunshine and roses...I still go out to lunch with him maybe once a quarter. Still very connected to him and his family. He's

just one of those very special people in your work universe that you meet and you're like, "Yeah, he's a good dude."

Feeling Known By a Leader

This code refers to examples of what leaders do to make a member feel known and appreciated as a person, above and beyond their organizational role. For John, the factory worker, had known the plant manager for years before Bruce hired him at the canning factory:

That's why he'd do anything for me. He hired me on the spot...without even an interview. And he's the one that said, "You're one of the smartest men here." To make a long story short, he knows me extremely well. He knows I'm the type of guy who's not going to screw up. If there's a problem, I ain't going to come to him unless it's really a problem. Bruce was trying to do two things. He didn't want to mess up his culture on this job. But at the same time, he wanted to make sure that I was getting everything that I needed.

For Ryan, a marketing specialist for a small government agency, the small office and close physical proximity to leaders facilitated interaction and relationship-building:

They were very close with us. We were all kind of lived in the same hallway. We got to see them quite a bit, whether it was marketing meetings, just to go over plans or just sitting, eating lunch with us or whatever it was. We were all really close. I could just easily walk down to their office, sit down and have a conversation. They were very open with everyone, and it was just very easy to talk to them. Sometimes, especially around football season, we would talk about football because our boss was a big fan of a certain school. My school played their school sometimes. So we'd talk about that and just kind of life stuff and they'd ask me about family and how things were going. And I got to meet their family a little bit, just at different events. We all got really close.

Chris, a software engineer, heard from senior leaders within his business unit that layoffs might be coming, and that they would help the engineers obtain positions in other areas of the organization:

Management communicated to all the engineers that things were looking tight, so they essentially encouraged people to look elsewhere elsewhere in the company just in case things were to go bad...It came from two levels above. Basically, my manager was involved in a meeting with all of his other new managers, and they

communicated to their engineers, their direct reports. They essentially asked us to update our resumes and email it to them with our skill sets because it looked like—and this was a nice thing that the upper management was doing, they actually were looking at the business environment right now, the marketplace, and said, “Look, it’s not looking good.”

They proactively were gathering people’s credentials and trying to look internally, within the company, and trying to position and find openings for people so they wouldn’t have to lay anybody off. This was for everybody. It wasn’t just for me. It was for everybody within this organization... MobileTech’s obviously a very large company, so—at least back when I was there—it varies a lot. It really depends more depends upon who the senior management is. I’ve heard of other cases where people get laid off, and they didn’t even know they were on the chopping block. It doesn’t happen all the time. I was just fortunate to be in an organization that had senior leadership that actually cared about the engineers and the individuals.

Going to Bat for Me

This code refers to examples when a leader spoke up to help an individual obtain a professional opportunity or to protect that person from something harmful within the organization. After Darren, a marketing manager for a global electronics company, was accused by sexual harassment by his female direct report (who Darren suspected was actually having some form of an inappropriate relationship with his boss), a vice president who had worked with him intervened on Darren’s behalf:

Again, I felt like I was on trial [with Human Resources]. I didn’t really have a chance to say, “This is what’s been going on.” It was, “Okay, your team lead says this. How do you respond to that? Your direct report says this. How do you respond to that?” It was me having to defend myself in front of this HR director who it seemed like she had already built her case and she was just wanting to back check it against what I thought was my version of events. So that happened.

Our VP found out about it. He was not happy about it. I don’t know what he said to the HR director, but I know he wasn’t happy. He ended up doing his own investigation with several other people inside the company, because I remember his words to me were—actually, there were two other sales people that I kind of relied on as a mentor. One of the sales people had said, “Evan, our VP came to me and he said ‘What’s going on because this is affecting obviously you and the work that’s going on in that group.’” And he said, “This is not the way that Darren

behaves. Darren would not do this to his direct report.” So that’s why he [Darren’s team lead] lost the investigation. The VP went to bat for me, which was great.

For Sam and Evan, two young men who dropped out of college to do management and technology development for a small, but growing chain of driver education schools, the company owner let the older, more tenured store employees know that Sam and Evan would be in charge. Sam shared:

Everybody kind of [respected our authority] —and primarily that’s because Brad [company owner] kind of came in and said, “Hey, these guys are in control. If you don’t listen to them, it’s not listening to your boss. So, essentially you’re going to not be here.” He kind of laid down the law when we came in, in a good way. He presented it in a good way that made everybody somewhat happy.

Investing in Me

This code represents examples of leaders who spent time with participants in order to mentor them and support the growth of their professional skills. Chase, worked for a large Human Resources outsourcing firm that offered a career development program for new college hires:

We had meetings that were actually hosted by the company. And so we [new college hires] would get together. We had these leaders basically that were leaders within the organization that were known as track champions. They kind of were in charge of our development and telling us what we were going to learn, and they would teach us certain things during these one-hour, once-a-month classes. Then toward the end we’d have a question and answer type thing and we were able to kind of air our concerns and just talk things out with us.

Sam, the store manager and technology developer for a driving school spent a significant amount of time one-on-one with the company owner to learn the business, and was given a large amount of responsibility for the business as well:

My freshman year at A&M I went to Houston to work my first full-time job. I was an overseer of a [driving school] location that we had. There were five locations. I was an overseer of one. It was a small company — still considered a small business. I definitely got my hands on a lot of different lines of work. I was

with the CEO most of the time, strategizing for future growth. What else did I do? I was also a concierge to some of our customers. I'd help them out when they needed help and any special requests. I also managed the store. I guess it has to deal with mostly managing people more than anything else.

CONCLUSION

Overall, codes related to Leadership that Leads to Exit illustrate the multitude of ways that leadership communication and related actions create implicit and explicit messages that can trigger exit-related sensemaking. To this point, it is important to note that many participants shared examples of handling several of these issues simultaneously, resulting in an intensely stressful work environment. Darren is just one example. In his first year with his company, he dealt with an abusive leader, a direct manager who viewed him as a threat, accusations of sexual harassment from his direct report (and a related surprise attack from a Human Resources director), and was caught in the middle of an inappropriate relationship between his direct report and his direct manager. He also had stressors outside of his work during this time, most significantly that his mother-in-law was diagnosed with cancer.

Taken together, the Leadership that Leads to Exit codes illustrate the intricate web of leadership communication that leads members to feel alone, unvalued, and even abused. If left unaddressed, a negative communication climate and fractured organizational culture may result, threatening the relational fabric, operational functioning, and financial viability of an organization. These issues can be further magnified if neglected and reinforced by managers and supervisors, the individuals who provide day-to-day supervision of teams and individuals across the organization. The next chapter will explore the managerial communication patterns that can further stress individuals, relationships and work effectiveness. Conversely, managerial communication

that helps strengthen relationships and an individual's organizational commitment will be uncovered as well.

Chapter 7: Malfunctioning Managers

Managers play a significant role in shaping the day-to-day experience of organizational members. These first-line representatives of organization's rules, policies, procedures provide the first line of clarification and support for organizational members. Together with leaders, they help members make sense of and navigate organizational culture and relationships. Axial codes in this set detail the process of a member's sense of "unbecoming" an organizational member as an outcome of the communication patterns experienced with their direct manager. Whether receiving Questions & Accusations or receiving messages that result in Creating Distance, members begin Questioning Manager's Competence and Focus of their managers as a result of these problematic communication patterns.

Additionally, individuals who reported these types of issues with their managers were often navigating more than one of the issues described here. For example, within his first year and a half on the job, Darren, a Texas-based mid-level marketing manager for a Korean-based global electronics company, dealt with an underperforming newly hired subordinate, an abusive and distant manager, and being targeted by a Human Resources director for alleged sexual harassment of his subordinate (Darren shared that in actuality he suspected his own manager, who raised the issue to HR, was himself the one to be engaging in an inappropriate relationship with the subordinate in question). Darren was left to navigate these multiple and overlapping Selfish System situations every day, requiring time, energy and emotional investment all above and beyond that required to complete his daily job responsibilities. This section will explore three axial codes documenting participants' experiences with malfunctioning managers: Questions &

Accusations, Creating Distance, and exploring the outcome of a having a malfunctioning manager, Questioning Manager's Competence and Focus.

Similar to the complex relationship that can exist with leaders, members also observed and received positive interaction from their managers, as reflected in the Sensing Strong People Focus axial code. These positive communication behaviors, detailed later in this chapter, offer a helpful contrast to the more frequently reported negative, malfunctioning managerial communication behaviors, providing insight into the conflicted and evolving relationships that can exist between superiors and subordinates. Exploring both the positive and negative communication dynamics of superior-subordinate relationships also sheds light on how one can feel conflicting levels of identification with various parts of the organization over time, and how this conflict contributes to shifts in identification and exit-related sensemaking. First, the dimensions of negative managerial communication will be defined.

MALFUNCTIONING MANAGER MESSAGE #1: QUESTIONS AND ACCUSATIONS

Often despite a high degree of effort, their managers questioned members' commitment or competence, or seemed to not notice or appreciate participants' desire to have a meaningful influence within the confines of their roles. In turn, this feeling set the stage for distance and/or conflict between these managers and subordinates, and in some cases, led to employee-abusive behavior (Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott, 2008) from the manager and/or the organization. Codes in this set reflect behaviors that represent the building sense of frustration participants felt in their relationship with their direct supervisor/manager.

Maggie shared the frustration she felt when, after consistently working without the products she needed to do her job, and frequently working entire shifts without a

break due to her supervisor's ineffective management she was denied time off to travel from Texas to California for her younger sister's ballet recital:

It was actually a gradual buildup of frustrations and there was a specific time at which I decided that I was pretty much done with this company...I went in to request time off and she basically said that I was new and I didn't have any time saved up for taking time off. There was never a mention of this, it's not in the employee handbook that you save up time. That's not how we get time off as a massage therapist.

It's just kind of a request type thing or it's a [find someone to] cover your shift type thing...It was just her attitude of, "This is your job and your clients are expecting you to be here" and, "Well, you need to put us and your clients ahead of your family" and I'm obviously not going to not go to my little sister's ballet recital.

Codes in this set include: Berating Me, Disrespecting My Time, Expecting Personal Sacrifice, Questioning my Personal Skill or Judgment and Sending Mixed Messages.

Berating Me

This code refers to behaviors that are meant to humiliate a subordinate, and as a result, are often done in front of others. For Darren, a marketing manager for a Korean-based company, this berating reflected the cultural norms of the organization—and contained comments that were especially personal and hurtful:

My team lead, the last time he talked to me before we had the period of silence, he had taken me into a room...and for the course of that hour, rather than me update him on projects, he basically treated me like I had seen the Korean senior vice president treat his Korean subordinate. He stood above me. He told me that I was a disappointment to him. He knew I was a military veteran. He knew that I regularly go to church, and his words were, "For someone who served his country, you're a disappointment. For someone with your set of values, you're a disappointment."

Similarly, marketing assistant Krissy was consistently berated by her new boss after he was promoted from the mailroom to a supervisory position in Krissy's

department. At first she engaged in sensemaking, giving her new boss the benefit of the doubt, but when his demeanor failed to change over time, she disengaged from the relationship:

When he got over me, I don't know if maybe it was the pressure he was under or something—and I guess he didn't like to be wrong about anything, so whenever I would try to teach him how to do stuff, he wanted to do it his way and so, at first, I was like, okay, whatever, just let it slide off your shoulder, don't let it upset you. And then, eventually, I was fed up, so when he would just go off, I would just shut off and just be like, okay, you do what you wanna do because there's no point in even saying anything to you about it. And then, eventually, I actually said something to him about trying to help him out and he would just go off on me when even though I was trying to help him and he was like, whatever, Krissy, and walked off. So, at that point, I was like, okay, I'm done.

It should also be noted that berating can also occur over email. Veronica received snippy emails from her manager telling her to email his assistant when she attempted to ask him for guidance on handling a client request. Chase was berated by his boss after he sent an incorrect file to a client while traveling on his first business trip for the company.

Disrespecting My Time

This code refers to instances of employees feeling like their time and effort was not appreciated, and was in fact wasted. This disrespect was most common in situations where employees either wanted to, or did take extra time, to contribute something they felt was particularly innovative or helpful to operational efficiency. Louise, a dog groomer, created a spreadsheet to increase the accuracy of the store's customer database:

I took the time when we were slow one time to go through the whole computer system and make a list of all the breeds that didn't have SKU's and all of the breeds that we see that weren't even listed in the computer system and all of that good stuff and made this really organized, very clear, concise list and gave it to my manager who had asked me to make it because I complained about it so many times. Then I never heard or saw anything to do with it again, which was pretty frustrating and disappointing to me because it's like no progress made

whatsoever. It was just like it fell on empty ears. That happened a lot at Pets-R-Us.

Lisa, a marketing specialist for a big advertising firm in New York, grew angry when she realized her boss expected her to read his mind, which a higher level leader confirmed for Lisa:

He already knew what he wanted. Nothing I wrote was right until I wrote exactly what he wanted me to write. That was (a) painful, (b) a waste of time, and it pissed me off. And it pissed him off, too. That time, I actually did tell our regional boss. I think he might have complained [about my work] or something like that. So I talked to her and said, “Look. I don’t understand. He asked me to do something, but then he already knows what he wants.” She’s like, “Yeah. He’s kind of like that. If he asks again, just give him what he wants.” I’m like, “Okay.” So, it was just a waste of my time.

Expecting Personal Sacrifice

This code refers to instances where an employee was expected to sacrifice personal time or physical well-being in order to work more hours. Physical therapist Chloe was pressured by her manager to pump breast milk in a public parking lot while providing physical therapy services at a high school sports event. She was also pressured by another supervisor to push back a surgery she needed due to a childbirth-related health complication.

Tony, a clerk in a clothing resale store, received the implicit message from his boss that he should avoid taking a bathroom break during his shift, and she also encouraged him to spend his time off visiting other retail stores to research fashion trends and pricing—activities for which he would not be paid. The last straw for Maggie, a massage therapist, occurred when her supervisor denied her request for time off so that she could fly home to attend her younger sister’s ballet recital.

It should be noted that the expected personal sacrifice could be financial as well. Pet groomer, Louise, who worked for minimum wage, was expected to hand out discount

coupons to customers, discounts that would then be taken from her per-groom compensation, not the company's portion of the per-groom revenue.

Questioning My Professional Skill or Judgment

This code reflects comments from managers that participants perceived as directly or indirectly questioning their skills or capabilities. Paul, a bank auditor received comments from his boss telling him that he was not quick enough at his very detailed bank auditing job. Paul felt that working faster would sacrifice the quality level of his high stakes work:

He wanted me to improve—as he called it—my efficiency, i.e. productivity: getting through the files faster... I basically always reverted more toward a quality side rather than a productivity side, so there was always that tension between that...The way they've [client] got it organized was extremely cumbersome to get through and the more cumbersome it was, the longer it took. The goal was to get through four files a day and it was a struggle to do that at times.

Darren's boss criticized his new product ideas, even though his boss lacked the experience needed to provide the constructive input Darren had asked for when he first began the project:

I found, I guess you'd call an undiscovered gem in a company. It was an area of health, senior living health care, where a lot of the company products would fit. Where you really sell more of a solution than just a single product, and no one really thought of this before. So, I had it in my proposal I had typed up. I had about a 30 to 40-page proposal, and I felt it was pretty well supported. I had been working on it for several weeks. He just tore it apart. He said it was, what were his words? He said it was underwhelming.

Before I had written this, I had asked him, "Hey, do you have any examples of work that you've done" in order to write this business piece where we have to get funding and support for it. He didn't have any, and he had been doing this job for four years. He said, "Well, this is something I've not done before." It was just odd to me that he would criticize work that he's never done himself, and again, he couldn't really give me specifics as to why he thought it was underwhelming. He

didn't say, "Well, you need more support here. You didn't properly analyze the competitive relationship."

Kim, a contracted administrative associate who staffed the lobby welcome desk for a global technology company, had her supervisor question her professional judgment after she followed the rule requiring her to clock out at 4:30 to avoid incurring overtime:

Our lobby hours were posted in the lobby very clearly that we are open from 7:30 to 4:30, Monday through Friday. On two occasions, I got phone calls at 7:00am from my manager and he would say, "Hey, Kim, we got a phone call and someone said they went to the lobby to try to get the microphones for a meeting the next day and you weren't there. So they [client staff] emailed the big wigs two up from me and explained how disappointed they were that I wasn't there to do my job.

I would ask, 'Well, what time did they come down? Oh, they came down at 4:45.' Well, right. I'm expected to clock out by 4:30 or shortly thereafter having closed my lobby at 4:30, so, no, you are right, I would not have been there at 4:45. But you're calling me at 7:00 am to get on to me for not being in my lobby conducting my business because your manager thinks that I need to be reprimanded because I wasn't at my job fifteen minutes past my time?

Sending Mixed Messages

This code contains examples of time when a message includes both a supportive message and a negative assessment about the participant or their work. Mabel, an administrative assistant for a school district, was disappointed when her boss, the special education director, didn't fight for Mabel to get a raise as she had seen her do for other people on her team:

I know that she has authority and I see her go to battle for other things. I felt like if she would have fought for me a little bit hard saying, I understand my hands are tied, but this is what we need to do, I think they [HR] would've done that. My feelings were very hurt then. But she was so supportive at work and outside of work, you know, like going to my parents' funeral or supporting my kids in school, for all the fundraisers, for the times that she'd go out of town, she'd bring me back gifts. And it was a great friendship that we had and she never bad-talked me to anyone inside the system or inside the school district. She never demeaned me ever, talked down to me, never treated me unequal.

Rebecca received mixed messages when she told her boss she was applying for another position internally, after he had forced her to give a bad performance review to one of her team members, a request Rebecca perceived to be rooted in her boss' personal dislike of this particular team member rather than an accurate reflection of his work.

It was a complete shock. And so at first he was like, "What can I do to make you stay?" But then it's almost like any relationship. People will say that, but then when you tell them and they say, "Well, something other than that." Or, "I hear what you're saying. Good luck with that new job." So it was kind of like that. It was hard.

Another form of mixed message was receiving a compliment about one's work – or in the reverse, negative comments about one's dedication from a second party. Rebecca's coworker commented to another colleague that Rebecca was a "masochist" for coming in at 6am to get work done before phones started ringing non-stop in their open office concept workplace. In another example, Rita emailed her boss and copied the CEO of their small credit union to ask for additional responsibility and more projects. In a meeting that followed, the CEO commented on Rita's request for extra work, "You're extremely bored, aren't you?"

MALFUNCTIONING MANAGER #2: CREATING DISTANCE

This axial code contains examples of managers engaged in actions or communication that created or exacerbated relational distance between themselves and their subordinates. For Darren, the feeling of distance from his supervisor, which had been growing rapidly during Darren's first few months on the job, came to a head before the Thanksgiving holiday:

I remember leaving for Thanksgiving holidays and I turned to him and said — because we hadn't spoken in like four weeks at this point — I said, "Have a nice Thanksgiving, Dave. See you in a few days." And he said nothing, didn't even turn to face me, didn't acknowledge me. He was just staring at his computer.

Q: And so how did that make you feel?

It was a tough place to be, I'll tell you that much. It was a big letdown. It kind of affected my self-worth. Here was a guy that the first four or five months of the year, we've been sociable, we hung out outside of work. It seemed like he was going to be a good colleague, and a complete 180 to here he is not talking to me, even when I try to make attempts to at least give a little bit of — show him a little bit of kindness. It felt like I was in a junior high lunch room when I was a kid. I was not at the cool kids' table. I was uninvited. I was not welcome.

Codes in this set include: Cutting Me Out, Figure It Out, Missing in Action, and Restricting My Autonomy and Influence. In Chloe's words, "The sole reason my I quit my job is because my manager made me feel like I was not worth it."

Cutting Me Out

This code represents examples of instances where participants were explicitly left out of key discussions, decisions, processes or opportunities by their managers. Being cut out often occurred based on one's lower role in the hierarchy, being female and/or being younger than other team members. Jeremy, a sales manager for a large urban newspaper, had to deal with a new boss who was going around him to give direction directly to Jeremy's team:

He threatened to fire me once because I asked him to respect the chain of command. He was going right to my people and also asking my people to go right to him, with all issues and challenges. And when he was going to my people, he wasn't filling me in on conversations they were having. So, it made it really, really hard for me to be a leader and to manage people when I'm saying, doing or not getting the full side of the picture. And when he's saying, giving direction, differently than I would do.

Andie, the chief marketing office for a small health foods company, was frustrated when her manager, the company's CEO, included her in branding discussions, but not financial discussions occurring in the preparation of their company's potential acquisition by a large national chain:

I wasn't the one in the limelight [unlike the CEO]. And so therefore, it was easy to not even know who I was at that time, to involve me in those discussions. So how it played out was here's the brand ambassador, so to speak, and we'll bring her into these discussions of some ideas for new business and who am I? Nobody even knows who the people are – keeping things together on a day to day basis.

Kim, a contracted administrative assistant staffed at a global technology company, was told by her on-site staffing agency managers that the very nature of her position meant she likely would not have the opportunity for advancement:

There were also times the team lead and our manager said that it was a beginner's position, or, "It's a starting position." It's a starter's position that people would start out with, but it wasn't a position that really took you anywhere. There wasn't potential for growth. That was something – it was a stepping stone, is a word that they really liked to use. It was a stepping stone job. Multiple times, they tried to explain it to us, "...People use this and so they can find something that they really want to do."

Lisa, a biracial marketing specialist at a large national advertising agency, was frustrated by having to speak on behalf of Hispanic consumers (rather than have their perspective omitted) when working with her account manager and other team members to plan advertising campaigns:

I would have to voice and try to kind of speak on behalf [of Hispanic consumers], like "Not everybody can relate to whatever it is you're trying to sell right now." But they didn't really care. But it was fine. I felt like I was only there so they could fill out a box...

She was also frustrated by the inability of the firm's diversity committee to secure more opportunities for minority employees to pitch their ideas to the agency's creative leaders, an opportunity critical to career advancement within the firm:

They [diversity committee] had been trying to do things, but people above them don't care. So, it only goes so far. In an agency like that, where the creatives are like gods, essentially if they don't care, that they don't have to care, they're not going to care.

Chloe noticed her manager was shooting down her ideas and telling her she was not making meaningful contributions, until she tried a different approach:

I would say something, a suggestion, and he wouldn't listen to it. But if I say it to another guy and he would mention it to him [manager], it would get done. At first I didn't think he was like that. At first I thought maybe I just didn't have great ideas. And then that started happening, which was funny because he told me that I wasn't bringing anything to the table anymore...The funny thing was, all my ideas were being pushed through, just not through me. I just found a way to get them to go through without actually having to talk to him. I just told a guy and I'd walk out without the credit. As long as it got done, I didn't care. It's getting done. Who cares? We're benefiting. What does it matter?

Figure It Out

This code includes examples of situations where participants were expected to identify tasks that needed to be done and learn the processes and procedures for how to do them without any guidance or training from their managers. Rachel's manager directly communicated an expectation for her to figure out how to obtain the information she needed from coworkers and clients, something she found frustrating given that this was her first job after college:

He had us on projects that he was working on, and so he just wanted me to figure out on my own, because he feels like, you know, you learn from your mistakes. But I feel like I really looked like an idiot a lot of times, because I had to make cold call interviews to the head of engineering [at a client], and I would just fall flat on my face, like asking questions that I should have known.

For Zach, a marketing assistant for a university museum, feeling behind since starting in a role for which he did not have previous experience, combined with the his desire to do good work for a boss he respected, amplified the pressure he felt to Figure It Out when he first started the job:

It was a little overwhelming because I had taken the position in communications and that was not my background. My training was in museums, but not necessarily in communications. I had to learn how to use AP style and how to write a press release. And the person who hired me had very high expectations, so I somewhat feared her and certainly revered and looked up to her. Kind of that delicate balance. And so when I first started, it was quite a learning curve.

As Zach's experience illustrates, the pressure to Figure It Out is not always explicitly communicated by one's manager. Kelly, a state welfare benefits case worker, was expected to Figure It Out not because of neglect from her manager, but rather because her manager's own workload left her no time to train Kelly for additional responsibilities:

My supervisor was carrying a full caseload from somebody else that had quit and she didn't have time to train me because we have a thirty-day time limit to work our cases and that's a federal regulation, so if we don't meet that thirty-day deadline, the feds will actually cut state funding for programs and so she was under pressure from the state office because of her cases, but she didn't have time to do any of her supervisor duties because she was carrying a full caseload. It's kind of like a Catch-22 - "I need to get her trained, so she can start on this caseload, but I don't have time to train her because I'm carrying this caseload," so it just kind of got dumped on me.

Kelly's boss also explicitly refused to get involved in the escalating interpersonal conflict Kelly was having with a coworker, even as Kelly struggled to navigate that workplace relationship while dealing with the personal stress of a health crisis facing her own special needs son, which added to her overall stress:

She [my manager] doesn't like conflict. She's a total pacifist and so she was just at the point where she was like, I'm tired of hearing you complain about her. I'm tired of hearing her complain about you. Just do what you need to do to fix this because I can't deal with this anymore. You guys need to work it out, solve your problems...so I talked with her [manager] about it and I was like, I am on emotional overload right now with Travis and I just don't have the energy to fight with Holly about stupid stuff that doesn't matter. I'm here to work. That's all I want to do. I'm not here to make friends. I'm not here to hang out. I just want to do my job and go home, basically, and she was fine with that.

Kelly's experience illustrates a larger theme running through these interviews—the fact that in today's ever-changing and increasingly under-resourced workplaces, individuals are navigating multiple task and relational complexities, while also managing personal stressors they cannot just leave behind when they leave for work each day. The

compounding effect of these stressors is felt by individuals, teams and organizations, as they struggle to become part of the culture of the organization.

Missing in Action

This code refers to instances where managers were physically absent and unavailable for questions. This occurred for various reasons, from job neglect to the amount of vacation time more tenured managers had available. Luke, a building maintenance technician, was frustrated by his boss' lack of guidance, given the physically dangerous nature of his job, as well as his perceived cause of his boss' frequent absence:

As a matter of fact, there was occasions I would call my boss with questions and he would not return my calls. He just didn't seem to care and he was just there to collect a paycheck... I don't even think he was there on location for forty hours a week. There was politics involved with their job and the longer you were there, the less work you can do. The new guy was expected to be a hero and get a lot accomplished - and in an unsafe work environment when you are not wanting to be a hero and wind up getting hurt.

Tim, an Army private, spoke of having to physically search for his commanding officer:

She was an E7, which is sergeant. In the building, she was in the administrative office. She was a cook, yeah, but she was just in charge of paperwork, that's all. She had the door closed for the most part. We had to go knock on her door. We actually had to find her. We had to find her if we needed her. We had to go around and look for her, because she never was really readily available for us. But it wasn't that bad.

Restricted My Autonomy and Influence

This code refers to examples of working for managers that micromanage their subordinates. The frustration felt by these subordinates was even more intense for individuals whose previous manager had, in contrast, trusted and empowered them.

Jacob, an accounting manager for an investment firm, experienced this change in management style:

I had a great boss for five years. Then they moved me to somebody new and we just didn't get on very well. And he moved into my funds as control over me. I didn't have a big problem with that. But I had a big problem with him starting to try to micromanage something that I'd been doing for five years without any help. And there wasn't going to be room for the two of us, really.

Veronica, a marketing manager, had a similar experience when her previous manager was replaced:

There were more meetings with him. He didn't want our advice. He wanted us to run events the way he wanted the events to be run, so he didn't need our advice or creativity. He would plan all the events and we would just execute them. I kind of felt demoted almost. I went from running a team to running no one. He didn't really need us mentally, he just needed us physically. It was basically like he ran the show, and we just did what he told us to do, which is totally different from how it was before he came to the company.

MALFUNCTIONING MANAGER OUTCOME: QUESTIONING MANAGER'S COMPETENCE AND FOCUS

This axial code represents the perceptions of managers generated as a result of Conflict and Abuse and Creating Distance. These codes reveal what participants feel is motivating manager decision-making, as well as factors influencing the quality of that decision-making. Maggie, a massage therapist, saw that her 21-year-old spa manager lacked the operational management skill for the position she held:

She was definitely not an on-time person. If we had a client at 9:00 or 10:00am, sometimes she'd be late opening the business. She was also not willing to let anybody else pick up the slack as far from the other managers disappearing from the staff [failing to rehire vacant positions]. She probably had way too much going on as far as interviewing new people to cover—it's not just massage, it's also facial and nails, and so she had all of these people to manage and support.

Chloe questioned the professionalism of her supervisor (who eventually became distant and verbally abusive), given the amount of detail she had shared with Chloe about issues in her personal life:

I do cut her some slack because throughout the whole time she was going through this nasty divorce. I mean, that's just really hard on anyone. I do. And then to have three children that you're looking after. She was under enormous amounts of stress. I felt bad that she had to deal with this on top of it—I did not want to be a burden to her. I did feel very bad about that. But, as her subordinate, I should not know that much about her life.

Individual codes in this set include: Lacking Experience, Lacking Trustworthiness, Making Decisions Based on Personal Convenience, Recognizing Their Constraints, and Trying to Get a Paycheck.

Lacking Experience

This code includes examples of participants observing or sensing that their managers lack managerial experience, relational skills, and/or professional competence necessary for the managerial role. In some instances, participants also noticed how their managers' connections to those in power, or conversely, their physical distance from those in power, served to protect them when they lacked the type or level of competence necessary for the job.

Rebecca, a director for a large global telecommunication firm, saw that the close personal friendship between her manager and her director, as well as her manager's strong subject matter expertise, served to protect him from the repercussions of his retaliatory management style:

And so then when I told him [leader] that I wanted to transfer because of my boss, that's when he was like, "Well, I'm not willing to put his head on the chopping block. I'm not..." And the problem was, they were best friends. It was like nepotism in the organization – and it was poison because a lot of people had already complained about this one person, my boss. The guy was a creative. He

was really brilliant – I mean brilliant. He had artwork that was just top notch. And that’s why his boss liked him. But he wasn’t a manager. And his boss just couldn’t get around that. So as much as people would complain about it, it was his boy and he wasn’t going to [do anything to him].

Chris worked under managers in several different units in his ten year career as a software engineer for a global technology manufacturer. He observed that these managers had varying degrees of technical expertise and saw value in managers’ understanding the technical details of a team member’s work:

In the past, I would say in the other departments that I was in—the first and the third — the managers were more distant from the actual coding and development. So, at first I had apprehension because the person I worked with dealt more in the technical and actually coded alongside some of us when we were working, and the hesitation is that sometimes if you get a manager that’s more technical, they can become more micromanagers and have a little more opinions on what you’re doing, so you don’t get as much distance.

But it worked out to my favor, because the lead that I had, because of that sort of visibility, he had more understanding and appreciation of people with different technical skills. I find that a lot of times people that are more managerial, less technical, lose, so then when that happens that [understanding of technical aspects] tends to get lost in the performance reviews, etcetera, towards the end of the year.

Chloe’s supervisor wanted her to be available to work and asked her to postpone a surgery she needed due to a childbirth complication. In her ignorance, she copied the company’s Human Resources manager on that email to Chloe:

Human Resources emailed me and was like, ‘Ignore that email from your supervisor. Go ahead with your surgery as planned, per your surgeon’s request.’ She got in a lot of trouble for asking me to push back my surgery.

Lacking Trustworthiness

This code refers to instances where a participant realized their manager could not be trusted to keep their confidence and/or that their manager’s relationships with others in the organization, particularly with Human Resources, inappropriately influenced their

managers' decisions and actions. Mary realized that her boss was "best friends" with the Human Resources director and that, as a result, concerns Mary shared with her boss in confidence would be shared with that Human Resources leader, who then shared them with other leaders across the organization:

My manager and the director of Human Resources at the time pretty much became best friends. They would pinpoint employees and say, "We don't like her. We don't like her." And the minute something is said, if I went to talk to Laura — the HR manager — she would literally go and tell my manager right away what I said. And then they both would run to the president of the company and say, "Well, this is what Mary says, and she feels like it's difficult to work with Leslie," and they wouldn't try to resolve the issue.

More extreme issues of professional integrity were shared as well. Luke noticed his boss at the airport where he worked as a contracted maintenance technician wearing the uniform of another contracted company during the hours his boss was supposed to be working for Luke's company:

The only supervisor there, I'd only see him a couple hours a week and his job was to order parts and he did a terrible job at that because we were constantly, constantly short of parts. He would just be there a few hours a week and you would wonder why, why isn't he here forty hours a week? I found out that he had another job at the airport and I would see him in his uniform for his other job during the time when he should have been working the job for the company that I worked, that we worked for. I just think that he was allowed to just put in part time hours and collect a full time paycheck. It seemed that way with the manager also. It seemed like nobody cared.

Making Decisions Based on Personal Convenience

This code includes examples of decisions that participants' believed their managers made based on what was easiest, least threatening or logistically convenient for their manager, seemingly without regard for the potential consequences for the team or organization. When looking to expand their team, Darren's manager overrode his preference and chose a candidate with no relevant experience:

The person he chose was not my first choice. I had someone in mind who we interviewed who had an impressive background in competitive intelligence. In fact, several people that we looked at had good backgrounds, but the person he chose was someone who had zero experience, other than a couple of business school projects. This person was 24 years old, fresh out of grad school. Her only full-time job experience had been as a Red Bull spokeswoman or sponsor girl, the ones that go out to the bars and they give out Red Bull and encourage you to mix drinks. Anyway, so to me it was—at first it was puzzling why he chose to hire her.

Kim's manager would schedule staff coverage based on what was most convenient for herself since she helped the team cover various lobby welcome desks across the corporate campus:

They sent out a morning schedule each morning of who would be covering certain lunches and breaks and different things, and there was not a lot of common sense used to set the schedule. It was more convenience. 'I don't want do this - the manager or the team lead [seemed to think] — 'I don't want to do this, so I'm going to let so and so go do this, but then for lunch, I will be over in this building, so it will be more convenient for me to be there and for them to go and do what is something across campus and not in the same area that they had been that morning.' Just real scatterbrained, real inexperienced, I guess, is another description.

Recognizing Their Constraints

This code refers to realizing that beyond any perceived incompetencies or political motivations, their managers also sometimes had what participants' felt was legitimate constraints in what they could do within their managerial roles. Zach realized that his boss was constrained, and appropriately focused on, the educational mission of the museum:

There was sometimes my direct supervisor had a grand vision and then the director had a grand vision and I had my vision...I respected her views and there were things I thought were good ideas, and things I thought wouldn't work. But they were all for the betterment of the organization. Again, I was in a non-profit position so it's not, "Hey let's do this so the boss can make more money." It was, "Let's do this because it would help our educational mission."

Sue, a neonatal nurse at a preeminent East coast university teaching hospital, was a bit disappointed in her manager's lack of support of her desire to go back for a Master's degree in nursing. However, she also understood that her boss was limited because the hospital did not have the necessary policies or procedures in place:

We chatted and she was nice about it, but I think that at a certain point, her hands are tied in terms of what they need on the unit to cover patient care and I understand that, but I also think that having something more set up for people that are going to school or—I don't know. There was no tuition reimbursement, there was no, really, anything, and their schedule was so fixed that I just knew there was no way I could go to school, work, and see my husband in a different state, really, ever, if I did that, so that was also—probably was the biggest factors [in my decision to leave] aside from getting married.

Jennifer noticed that her boss' workload as a professor of engineering at a large state university left him pulled in many directions, contributing to the procrastination and moods that made it challenging for her to stay positive and get her own work done on time:

Dr. Creighton is the program director. He's got a lot of administrative stuff going on and he doesn't really like that as much. He likes teaching and everything. So, having to deal with that and having to just—pushing to do stuff. He needs to get stuff done—and he needs to get stuff done. We can't get anything done until he does his stuff. And he has a real bad habit of putting everything off until the last minute. That makes it difficult.

Trying to Get a Paycheck

This refers to instances where participants reached the conclusion that their managers did not have an authentic interest in doing what was best for the organization or the people who reported to them. John reported that not only his boss, but other managers and leaders did not really care about the success of the policies they implemented:

Something else that bothers me, that makes it seem mundane is just—it seems like the people in charge are just there, just to do a job. A lot of the policy they put in place, they know they're not going to work. They just do it because they're told

to. And then they'll leave it. They'll tell us to do something and they don't even follow up on it, to see whether it's done or not.

Louise grew fed up with managers not addressing the issue of coworkers taking extended breaks and lunches, among other operational issues. Over time, this impacted her motivation and commitment to her job:

I just I don't know that really anybody really cared that much. It was more just like people trying to get a paycheck. I'm being paid regardless of whether I handle the situation or not, and I'm a hard enough worker that it's hard for me to not do a good job, so shit would still get done—excuse me—but definitely, they'll get done even though she wasn't around because I'd work my butt off twice as hard to make sure it got done.

Q: And so how did that end up making you feel about the store?

It was tiresome. I got fed up pretty quickly. It became one of those things where I didn't want to go to work anymore. I just would rather have stayed at home and been unemployed because even with everything that I liked about my job working with the animals, working on my own schedule, having my own time, it just was not enough to keep me there because it was just too much work to try and keep everything going smoothly on my own.

PEOPLE-FOCUSED MANAGEMENT

Although the majority of codes participants used to describe their managers were negative, positive communication and behavior were noted as well. In some instances a manager displayed positive behaviors in the beginning, but changed over time due to personal or organizational shifts, or unfolding communicative developments in the leader-member relationship (Graen & Uhl - Bien, 1995). This axial code refers to communication behaviors that signal a commitment to their subordinates. Although occurring much less frequently than codes documenting concerns and frustrations with their managers' communication patterns, the findings here are worth noting as a point of contrast. Although previous Malfunctioning Manager codes focused on the negative communication behaviors that led to members unraveling themselves from organizational

membership, the People-Focused Management codes shed light on the messages and behaviors that can strengthen a subordinate's affinity and respect for their manager.

Chase, an HR process specialist for a large HR outsourcing firm, appreciated the strategic career advice he received from one of his managers:

My direct manager saw another place for me I guess to grow. So she wanted me to go to that client instead. After that happened, a position opened within another client and they needed extra help. So, she kind of sat down with me and just said, "You know, this would look great to leadership, and you know, I think you should really do it. It's a great growing opportunity for you." I don't think that's really typical because not many of the new hires had to do that. I just agreed to it and did it because what she said – that it would look good to upper management and I was hoping to grow my career in that organization and stay for a while.

Codes in this set include: Became a Friend, Confirmed My Perspective, Honed in on Everyone's Skillset, Provided Career Development Opportunities, Provided Direct Positive Feedback, Valued My Professional Opinion.

Became a Friend

This code refers to actions or perceived relationship qualities that cause participants to feel their relationship with a manager is something other than a typical superior-subordinate relationship. For Joe, a sales representative at a small family-owned golf vacation planning company, his boss, who was also a non-family member, became his "best friend" both at and outside of work. Jacob recalled meeting his old boss for a drink recently and Mabel spoke of the kindness her boss displayed when she was going through a difficult time in her personal life:

Within the four and a half years that I was there, I had to move one time and sell my house and I would go just like crazy and stress out at work and try to keep everything and she gave me an afternoon off and then she gave me the plants from the office to stage my house before it went on the market. And, to me, that's like out of the norm. Bosses don't normally do that, but to ease my mind at work, she wanted to give me the afternoon off, go get my house straightened out, go get it on market, and come back on Monday with a fresh start.

Confirmed My Perspective

This code refers to examples of when a participant experienced his manager confirming a perception of a particular organizational event, decision or policy. Zach felt validated when his manager confirmed his frustration with the pay scale offered for his position:

When I told the director and my direct supervisor that I was leaving, they knew right away that it was because of that [low salary]. My direct supervisor said in my exit interview, “You know, the worst part is that they’re just going to go out and hire someone for more money, what you would have wanted - to keep up with the demands of inflation.” So, it’s easier for someone to leave and rehire at a higher grade than it is to give someone a raise in the university. She was acknowledging the irony in that.

Maggie felt validated when she talked to her former supervisor after he “disappeared” from the workplace. He confirmed her suspicion that he had quit due to a continuing disagreement related to his advocacy of providing for the professional needs of Maggie and the other massage therapists:

Occasionally we’ll chat or we might run into each other around town. I knew that he had gone to the manager regarding all of the frustrations and he basically said that he left. He said that they actually did get into it, things got heated and she [manager] was yelling at him and she was reprimanding him in a way about going behind her as far as accommodating the massage therapists.

Honed in on Everyone’s Skillset

This code refers to a manager who demonstrates an awareness and appreciation for the unique skills of each team member. Chris expressed appreciation for his manager’s own technical skills, perceiving that this helped his boss recognize and value Chris’ own technical skills more, something he saw reflected in his annual performance reviews. Jacob described how his manager recognized his skills and gave him room to both use and further develop them in his daily work:

He was able to kind of hone in on everybody's kind of particular skillset and place that. And never really got overly angry and never – never talked down to anyone. He was never irrational or overbearing or anything like that. He also let you take chances and make your mistakes and that sort of thing. He kind of gave everybody as much responsibility as they were capable of, and let you run with your own fund without micromanaging. And that was kind of the type of person that I liked.

Provided Career Development Opportunities

This code refers to managers who provided career development opportunities in terms of technical guidance, career mentoring or advancement-related advocacy. Nicole, a school psychologist, felt supported by her direct manager in her professional growth, as well as by other managers within the department:

I definitely felt supported. Each situation was unique, so there may be times where I came across a case and then talk about it with my supervisor. And she'd say, "No, that might be one you want to move forward with a little bit faster." Or, "No, you go ahead and suggest this intervention, go with this consultation model and see how things go." I think that might be one of the reasons it was a challenge, because each case is different...knowing that fine line between when the right time to go quickly or sit back and let the consultation process play out. But I felt supported. If I had questions or was unsure about what to do, I could get some good advice from people within the department.

Provided Direct Positive Feedback

This code refers to examples of managers who took the time to provide feedback participants felt was specific, focused on skill-building and framed with positive intent. Rick, a young accountant, highlighted his appreciation of the constructive feedback he received from his manager—and saw feedback as an important managerial skill:

You like to see that person [manager] putting in the same amount of effort that you're putting in. The role that I was in, you're constantly getting feedback from the person above you - and when they're giving you feedback, it was productive feedback — so it wasn't a really waste of your time. They were thoughtful and delivered it the right way and not being rude when they're giving it to you, you know? I think it's a combination of being driven and caring about what they're

doing and putting in the effort, and then also having a good head on your shoulders, being able to manage people effectively.

Veronica, a young marketing manager, appreciated that her manager shared the positive feedback he received from clients about the work she had done, and his willingness to let her take the lead on additional projects:

I remember opening this Fitness Shaquille O’Neal 24 Hour Fitness, like one of the first ones he built in Texas, and that was fun because my boss used the majority of my ideas. And so the event ran smoothly and it was fun and we had music and food, and it was enjoyable because the people that came to the event, they liked it a lot and my boss was happy.

He received tons of positive feedback from the client, which made him look good, and then he told me, “Thanks. You did a great job. Everybody loves us.” And so on other accounts, clients requested me to be in charge of it. It basically gave me more work.

Valued My Professional Opinion

This code refers to feeling like one’s professional expertise is recognized and valued, and that one is free to speak her mind related to concerns about work-related processes and policies. Anne, a special education coordinator, appreciated that her supervisors let her speak up and ask questions about the state-mandated policies and procedures she had to follow when coordinating services for children with special needs:

That was one of the other things that I really liked about that job is that I could express that to my supervisor, that specific, “This isn’t what you” —not necessarily my supervisor in particular — “what the State is telling us what we have to do. Are they [the State] actually in these families’ homes and seeing how this will look for them, how it will feel for them and that it really doesn’t make sense, or it doesn’t flow?”

CONCLUSION

Overall, codes in the Malfunctioning Managers code set reflect specific, yet often subtle messages to which participants assigned significant meaning related to the degree

to which their managers valued their professional expertise and their voice—or not. The Sensing Strong People Focus codes, although occurring less frequently than the other codes, provide a helpful contrast to the problematic messages and communication patterns that facilitate a decision to unravel one’s self from organizational membership.

Chapter 8: Coworkers as Work

Organizations today are increasingly team-based, resulting in greater coworker influence over individual's sense of work satisfaction (LeFasto & Larson, 2001) and engagement. One's coworkers are the people they interact the most with, seeking information to understand organizational culture (Jablin & Miller, 1991). Codes in this category illustrate the specific communicative messages that participants receive in the workplace related to establishing either closeness or distance to coworkers. These messages may be related to task completion, personal relationships with coworkers, and/or reflections on broader organizational events or changes. Participants' relationships with coworkers were ultimately a significant source of sensemaking related to their sense of identification with the organization. In several cases, a relationship with a single problematic coworker caused participants to question their desire to remain with the organization, even among individuals who enjoyed other aspects of their work. As these situations illustrate, the frequency and tone of exchanges between coworkers contributes to the communication climate that exists not only between those coworkers, but also within teams, potentially becoming embedded in the various communicative aspects of the organization's culture.

For Kelly, her relationship with her coworkers across the State was a vital source of social support given both the socially tainted nature of her work as a welfare benefits coordinator (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Rivera, 2014; Tracy, 2004) and the stress of working within a significantly understaffed organization and under-resourced system:

I think that the longer I worked there and the more that I got to know different people around the state, um, there's—there's this sort of camaraderie that you develop with other state workers because nobody really—I mean, you could talk about it and explain it all day long, but nobody really understands what benefit

workers do unless they've done it. A lot of the people in management positions, like the district superintendent and the district managers and the governor and the director of the agency—none of them have ever been benefit workers before and so they really didn't get it. They didn't understand what we did and how the process works and it was just—I mean, it was nice to have that connection with other workers in the state to be like, “Yeah, I hear you, I get you, I feel you, I know what you're talking about.”

Rick, a new auditor received instrumental and informational support from his colleagues, as they worked very long hours with high productivity and demands, and the sacrifice of his personal time. He also learned the norms for his profession and the auditor and manager roles:

I would say that the people I learned the most from—it was a two-tiered kind of thing—they had a good experience in auditing and they were well versed at accounting, and then they also were good with people as well. They could explain things effectively. Sometimes there you were under a senior associate and they'd be real smart, real graphic and convey the message. But on the other end, they could convey the message but they didn't understand what they were talking about. So, the people you work well with, it seems were the people you got along with better, too. It's just naturally easier to communicate with them. Like at the company, it was those that you form good bonds with and everything else were more willing to help you out as well.

As these initial examples illustrate, coworkers can provide a valuable source of organizational norms and values, professionalism and social support, as will be explored in the Creating Closeness and Inclusion axial code. However, making sense of and navigating coworker relationships can also be a taxing form of emotional labor and can play a significant role in an exit decision. Three additional codes in the Coworkers as Work code reflect this darker side of coworker relationships: Creating Distance and Exclusion, Assessing Work Through a Coworker Lens, and Experiencing Outcomes. This section begins by examining the dark side of coworker relationships before turning to explore the more positive dimensions.

CREATING DISTANCE AND EXCLUSION

Perceiving or experiencing that one is being excluded from coworker relationships and the interpersonal connections and career opportunities associated with those relationships was revealed as a significant point of frustration, concern, and even trauma for participants. Individual codes within Creating Distance and Inclusion include: Backstabbing, Being Excluded or Orphaned, Being Ignored or Rebuffed, Dealing with a Busybody, Feeling Drained by Them, Guilt Tripping, Handling Snarky Comments, Picking Up Their Slack, Taking Credit, and Working Around Me.

Backstabbing

This code refers to examples of when a coworker a participant felt they should be able to trust, because of perceived similarity, professional responsibilities, or situational context, did something that broke that trust. Alyssa was backstabbed by a fellow newcomer to whom she had discussed difficulties she was having with her new boss:

I got sent to a conference in Florida and someone else from my organization who I hadn't really met before—I'd seen her around the office, but I never spoke with her – went as well. One night we went for dinner and we started talking. She said, "Where are you going to end up in the reorganization?" I said, "Right back where I started." I told her what happened when my boss said that to me. I didn't think anything of it and we were sharing a lot of kind of—commiserating about how frustrating and how hard it was to fit in and how that was a really challenging position. About two weeks after we got back from that trip, HR called me and said, "We need to talk." And I thought, 'Okay, that's weird.'

And so I went outside with HR—we were sitting on the patio and she said, "Well this person who went on the trip with you told us what you said about not getting the job [new job available after a restructuring]." She had gone to HR and told them that my boss had said it was because I was pregnant and going to be a new mom. I just thought that was a really, really shady underhanded thing to do. She went to HR the day she knew I was going to be out of the office. Then she was going to be out of the office the three days after she told...It turned into a really, really big mess. So, I hadn't made a connection with anybody. Five months into my job when I thought I was making a connection with someone, she turns around and actually stabs me in the back with it.

Jean struggled long-term with a peer level vice president level colleague who Jean felt held a grudge towards her after he was demoted and she was not:

Well, it was painfully obvious that they weren't going to do anything about this guy. Even in my evaluation they wrote that they knew that some of the struggles that I was having was because of this guy—it's like, really? And about eight months or so ago, I started having some new health problems that I've never had before that are many times secondary [sic – related] to stress and we started integrating our product with a product from Preston.

Preston is the biggest player in the industry. They have an information system that half of the school districts in the country use and just bringing our product with theirs means that we have access to software probably to half the school districts in the country, so it could be a huge thing. And this guy, the problematic guy, would do anything just so we're not good, like giving them pricing without being approved by corporate and trying to get contracts through without reading it. Little things like that [laughs].

Being Excluded or Orphaned

This code refers to examples where participants perceived that coworkers were excluding them from decision-making or other opportunities. Comments indicated a variety of perceived reasons for this exclusion – from racial differences, to geographic distance and hierarchical or status difference between organizational members.

John, an African American factory worker, spoke of how his White coworker excluded him from job training-related conversations with their teammates:

When it would come time to share information or train, if there was two people, he would literally turn his back to me. He would look at the other person and tell them the information. I would move around to where the other person was. He would move and turn his back. He never gave me eye contact. He would take that person and walk ahead of me. He would never talk to me about training. I had to pick up what I could by either listening to trying to find out. If I asked any questions, he would say, “Oh, you know that.” Or something like that and he wouldn't give me the answer. Or blow me off or something like that. That continued on. Then, if it was someone else that he liked, he would take them and literally show them exactly what was going on. He would show them what was going on. But if it was me, he wouldn't do that. He would not do it.

John also spoke more generally of the friendship—and coded topics of conversation—that existed among his White teammates and from which he was excluded:

You'll never come out and say that 'n' word or "You helped that black guy." But there's an unspoken camaraderie and die to the earth loyalty to them as opposed to you. There's even a different language spoken, and a different culture. It's not just that it's different, it's that, with them, it's like, "He don't have a clue. He don't understand. You from over in the hood. You don't know what we're talking about. Don't even get in our conversation." That kind of thing. Not saying just a look, just an attitude. Like, chewing tobacco—I don't chew tobacco. Even the vernacular as far as "the hood" as opposed to where they live at. That's all racism.

Rebecca found herself and her team excluded from larger team conference calls following a merger:

I was all of the sudden now reporting to a guy in Washington. That guy was really great, too, for his team in Washington. He was a creative and all that stuff. But he didn't know us in Austin. So then all the sudden, we were in a situation where 80% of the team was located together, sitting next to each other, having lunch with each other. And we were all orphaned over here [in Austin]. We'd get on conference calls and nobody would show up. And they wouldn't even feel bad about it. You would call them later and be like, "We had a call." "Oh, shoot, we forgot to put the bridge on for you guys. Well, we made these decisions. Here you go. Here's what we're doing. Can you go do that?" You're like, "Wow."

Alyssa was excluded from every day conversations because her desk was several feet away from the rest of her teammates – and located behind a pole:

My group had 5 people. One worked remotely. Three worked in a little – it was an open floor concept layout for the office. Three worked in kind of like a little pod together and then I was off by myself. I felt like those three who worked together – I often saw them chatting. I saw them talking about stuff. Five or six times, we'd be in a meeting and they'd say some sort of inside joke. They'd say, "Oh....," And they'd share an inside joke. They'd be like, "Oh right, you weren't there. You weren't part of that conversation." No one ever stopped over to talk to me or include me in a conversation, or do any of that. So I got a lot of those kind of, "Oh you weren't part of that conversation."

In addition to being socially isolated from her coworkers, Rita was also isolated from her profession because her organization did not view time spent attending community events as “work” and would not pay for her time spent attending them:

There was no one I connected with there, so not only am I unhappy with my job, I wasn't making any friends. I think at first — no one invited me out to lunch and those types of things, which in the end, I'm glad I didn't get involved in any of that, because I stuck to myself, but I also didn't make any connections. That was a hurtful thing, because I wasn't out meeting people. As a marketing person, I was like, “Okay, new channels.” I'm going to be able to network, meet some people. Absolutely not. So, that was frustrating, and from a personal standpoint, it was difficult.

Being Ignored or Rebuffed

This code highlights examples of instances when coworkers explicitly excluded participants or they observed others being excluded. In addition to the implied exclusion she perceived (as noted in the previous code), Alyssa also shared examples of being explicitly rebuffed when she tried to connect socially with her teammates in her first few months on the job:

I'm a very social person. I'm pretty good at talking to people. I remember on the first or second week that I was there, someone—I went over to someone who I thought was kind of approachable and I said, “Hey, what's going on?” It was a Friday afternoon and it was that 2:00, Friday doldrums where no one wants to work and it's too early to leave. I went over and she was like, “Do you need something?” I said, “No, I was just coming over to see what you're doing this weekend.” She was like, “Oh, I don't really have plans.” I just thought, if this is the most approachable person I have, I'm really in trouble. And it just never really took off. So for a very long time, I didn't feel there was any connection to anyone.

Also, someone's father-in-law died and I sent her an email the day after I heard he had passed away. I said, “I know you're at work today and I'm really sorry to hear about your loss. Would you like to go to lunch?” She's like, “No thanks.” Okay. Maybe she was busy or something like that. But just didn't really — your response might have been, “No, but—I'm really busy today, but maybe when I get back.” Or, “I really appreciate that. It's really nice of you.” Her

response was, “No thanks.” And so it just was really hard. I kept trying. Everybody would just look at me like, ‘You need something?’ It didn’t matter what I did.

Louise felt ignored by a coworker who frequently took excessively long breaks, causing Louise to miss her own break times. Louise’s feelings of being ignored were exacerbated by her manager’s unwillingness to address the situation:

It felt like I didn’t have support from above and I didn’t have support in that one specific coworker who I worked with quite frequently. I had no support from her, even when she was supposed to be there. I couldn’t even ask her, like, “I really need to be able to go take my break at this time, can you make sure that you’re here so that I can go on my break?” It would an hour and forty-five plus minutes later that she would show up than when I was supposed to take my break. It’s like, you knew I wanted to be going and taking my break at this time and you just blatantly neglected that.

Kelly sympathized with a coworker she observed was rebuffed because her colleagues felt this coworker violated the image expectations the community had for their profession of social workers:

Every year in Wyoming, they have Sturgiss [motorcycle festival] and the entire state of Wyoming is just overrun with bikers. She was at the Festival in a bikini washing motorcycles and they took a picture of it and put it in the newspaper and it caused this huge scandal because people – it’s a small community and it’s a very conservative community and they felt that a social worker whose primary job is telling people how to raise their children should not have a half-naked picture of herself in the newspaper.

It was really hard for her to live that down because the other workers in my office were constantly still clinging to that and making comments about her behind her back about her choice of clothing and how she carried herself. It got to the point where when she was walking down the hall, she wouldn’t even look. She wouldn’t look. She wouldn’t say hi. She wouldn’t acknowledge the other workers. I don’t blame her because I wouldn’t either if people were talking shit about me behind my back, you know?

Dealing with a Busybody

This code captures examples of time spent devising strategies to avoid or manage interactions with coworkers who stir up trouble or otherwise distract participants from completing their job responsibilities. Examples also highlight the energy participants had to devote to handling the problematic outcomes generated by the busybody. Kelly found herself the target of a busybody after another coworker quit:

The lady [Dina] that we hired to replace her [former coworker] sat in an office next to me ...and so I actually did most of Dina's training, helping her out with her clients and her cases and figuring out eligibility and stuff. Teresa was really jealous of the relationship that we had and so she kind of started doing the same thing to me, like, "Oh, Kelly's such a bitch, Kelly's so..." you know, whatever...

There was an empty office between me and her and I could hear her talking. All she did was talk all day long, which was probably why she was so far behind on her caseload. Talking about clients, badmouthing people, and I got sick of it, so I would put my earbuds in and listen to music so I couldn't hear her, so I could focus on what I was supposed to be doing. That bothered her, too, of course... I stopped [talking to her] because I'm like, "I'm here to work." I'm not here for social hour.

Rita was shocked when she was "told on" for violating a dress code she was not aware existed:

There the culture was very catty. And actually the majority was women. I think there was only five men out of 80 employees...I got told on by three people that I wasn't wearing pantyhose. Instead of an employee coming up to me and saying, "Hey, Rita, this is a really stupid rule, but you have to be wearing pantyhose," they went to my boss. Yeah, so that's how backward and old school these people were, that you had to wear pantyhose. I mean, how ridiculous is that? So I got told on, which was absolutely ridiculous and immature and unprofessional. The culture would just, it — I was shocked. Credit unions are a different breed. I thought it was going to be more of a banking financial culture.

Feeling Drained by Them

This code refers to the exasperation participants felt as a result of dealing with coworkers that were not easy to work with and/or had different personalities or priorities.

Rachel used the metaphor of a cast of characters to illustrate the energy required to navigate the daily dynamics of her team:

The girl that I had to work with was pretty caustic. She was never friendly to me, even though we sat right next to each other. She was just belittling and biting in her comments to me. Having to work with her was a drain... I mean, my group was, I felt, the misfits toys from Babes in Toyland, because Anita was caustic to me, no matter what. Seth, I felt didn't fit because he had all this crap going on in his personal life with [a son with] autism, and divorce, things like that.

And then Michael was just — he was sexist. He would help me with a map. Our forecasting is derived from mapped out locations, and it was just kind of remark about how I probably couldn't do the numbers because girls aren't good at math, things like that. He thought very well of himself. He has a physics degree, and also I talked to Ethan him about, even before this and he said despite all the things that he'd done and how he was off putting to everybody, he's got a heart of gold, and you've just got to get beyond that. I was like, "Okay." But the team that I worked with, I was not fond of.

Ron used a headache metaphor to explain the blame game that played out anytime there was a problem with the chemicals he and his teammate were responsible for monitoring:

Did you ever notice when people have arthritis or a throbbing headache, or much younger when they're hung-over, they get harpy and bitchy at kind of everyone? It was like that. You're upset and you hate your life, and it's friggin' cold, and it's 5:00 a.m. and you're here and you know why you're here. It's for obviously a paycheck and commodities and trade, but you're also kind of cutting everyone down. You're like, "Well, you spilled the worst of it." And I'm like, "Dude, I don't really think that's the problem, but if that's really the problem, then why don't you go and handle it."

Sally's example illustrates the long-term consequences of dealing with a draining coworker, and the additional frustration when management fails to address the behavior. Sally had a coworker who had continually singled her out for verbal abuse, which came to a head one day when the woman thought Sally had something to do with a recent change in the team's schedule:

One of the girls who was particularly difficult to get along with had been there a long time...kept attacking me personally, making disparaging comments about me to other people. I went in to give her a break and she made a really nasty comment to me about it was my fault that her break time got pushed back for a while. We were short of help and everybody was just kind of doing what was necessary to ensure that everybody got their breaks, and her break was pushed back a little ways, and she wasn't happy about it because she was totally inflexible and didn't care about anybody but herself. She basically read me the riot act and stomped out of the building to take her lunch break.

She had treated me like that before, so I finally had had enough and I sent an email to her supervisor and explained exactly what had happened. And she [boss] actually said that that same person had spoken to her very disrespectfully earlier in the morning — this is her boss as well as my boss — and that she was going to go to the big boss and tell him what was going on, and that was not going to be allowed to be happening, blah, blah, blah. Well, nothing ever came of it, because she'd been there for a long time, and they let her get away with talking to people like that.

Guilt Tripping

This code refers to comments participants received from coworkers when coworkers' felt the participants had violated expectations of loyalty to them as individuals, the team, or organization. Jerry's fellow start-up founders were shocked when he decided to leave their partnership as a result of frustration Jerry felt in trying to integrate their company's operations into those of the public company that had recently acquired their former start-up:

I think one thing companies need to be cognizant of is market value of individuals and what their worth is outside the company. I think my partners were very shocked when I left the partnership – they viewed the partnership as something sacrosanct and almost taking on a life beyond just a business arrangement. I viewed it just as a business arrangement that ultimately leads to compensation. And finding another job that doubled or tripled what I could make, to them didn't matter. It was, "How could you leave a partnership?" And in many ways, my outside worth was well in excess of what I made at that startup. For me, it's about maximizing the value of the work and effort and knowledge that I put into a company. And I think companies just need to be aware of that. Why do people leave? It's a free market. If the value you bring to a company is rewarded with a higher monetary value, it's kind of hard to stay in the position you're in.

Jane was “guilt-tripped” by a coworker when she began speaking up about a number of illegal activities happening in the restaurant, which was owned by a family member of this coworker:

I don’t really know the extent of what he kind of meant out of it, he was just like, “You don’t need to be telling anybody this. It’s none of your business. We’ve got this.” Pretty much guilt-tripping me as well because they had a lot of children, they didn’t have any money. They were like, “Well, they’re going send us back to Mexico and it’ll be all your fault if you tell anybody anything.” It was a lot of pressure coming from them and at the time I wasn’t able to find another job and I was making such decent money there that it was hard to leave for a while.

Handling Snarky Comments

This code highlights examples of direct comments made to participants by coworkers and how they responded. Kelly received a snarky comment from a problematic coworker based on how she adapted her work area to reduce the number of times she was interrupted each day while working:

Because I had windows in my office and the bright light, the fluorescents hurt my eyes and my office was right up front next to the lobby, so clients were constantly like, if somebody was up front talking with the receptionist instead of waiting their turn, they would walk into my office to hand me papers or to ask me questions or whatever, so I was constantly being interrupted by clients. I found that if I turned my light off, they wouldn’t come in and for some reason that bothered her. So then she was like calling me names, you know, “Kelly just sits in the dark like a mushroom” and blah, blah, blah and I could hear her.

Rebecca was similarly commented upon by a coworker for coming in early, before the rest of the staff. She tried to either ignore the comments or respond in a non-face threatening way:

The phones weren’t ringing quite that early—because it could get really hectic throughout the day, you’re just hearing all this ringing—and I just wanted that time to focus, and I feel like I’m a morning person, so I would get a lot of stuff done in that regard, too.

This other manager came up to my desk and says, “Wow, you don’t have to come in at 6:00-6:30 in the morning.” She overheard and said, “She’s a masochist.” I was just like, “Is that really necessary?” I didn’t even say anything to her, because I don’t know what to say, but the boss is kind of complimenting me, but at the same time saying, “You don’t need to do this.” But I’m like, “I kind of do because my clients are in Asia, and there’s a 14-hour difference.”

Anyway, that’s the kind of remarks that she would make. There’s another one she said before I even left, because I had gotten married during the time I was there, and she’s like, “You know, a lot of my friends that got married, they’re fat now.” Like saying that I was going to get fat. Because I’m married now, I don’t have to try as hard. I’m like, “Actually, you know, my husband and I like to go to on walks together, so I don’t really think that’s going to happen.” I either tried to make it light-hearted, and, “You know, maybe not,” or I would just kind of let things go.

Jean’s coworker took effort for years to discredit her reputation and considerable accomplishments, even as she earned multiple promotions and ultimately a senior vice president role within the company (during which time he had been demoted). He even attempted to blame her for performance problems in the department he led:

When my new boss started - and this was four or five years ago - all of the practice leads got together in a meeting and we were putting together a presentation to introduce ourselves to each other...During the presentation, he made comments like, “One of the competitors that we have is EduSharp. Jean went to work for EduSharp for a period of time, so you might want to talk to her about that.” [laughs]

And we had had a reduction in force, in the sales part primarily, which is what he’s responsible for. He put up a picture of me on the sales team organizational chart and then he, slide by slide took each one away. He turned it into a little bunch of sticks – “This person was red and this person black and we had to replace them. This person was terminated before we were done,” then there were like three little sticks for the people left at the organization, and he implied that I was the one that had disassembled the sales organization. But in reality, the sales organization for three years had not brought in enough revenue to pay for the sales organization. We had not brought in enough revenues to cover their costs, let alone the whole organization’s costs. So, you know, that’s a working model, right? [sarcastic]...In that presentation, he made several comments in front of all my brand new colleagues about things that I had done wrong in managing the operation.

Picking Up Their Slack

This code captures examples of the physical and emotional effort participants put into doing the work of coworkers who failed to fulfill their professional responsibilities in the workplace. Tony grew tired of picking up the slack for coworkers who would consistently call in sick for their weekend shifts in a busy clothing resale shop:

One thing that came to play that was kind of a repetitive theme was a lot of times people would call out on the weekends because of going out and having too much fun the night before and the weekends were always when we were busy, so, generally, we were short-staffed, It was just kind of running around and doing everything, helping customers that are out looking for items on the floor, and usually the place that seemed to be the most stressful was working in the dressing room area. People, the line would get really long and customers would generally – have this urgency kind of feel to them, so it felt like a need to rush more there than anywhere else and that would tend to be where I found myself overwhelmed more often than not.

Tired of problematic coworkers, animal lover and pet groomer Louise reached a point where she did not even want to go to work because her coworkers so detracted from her ability to focus on her passion for pet care:

It was tiresome. I got fed up pretty quickly. It became one of those things where I didn't want to go to work anymore. I just would rather have stayed at home and been unemployed because even with everything that I liked about my job working with the animals, working on my own schedule, like having my own time, it just was not enough to keep me there because it was just too much work to try and keep everything going smoothly on my own.

Taking Credit

This code represents examples of when participants saw, or learned second hand, that coworkers were taking credit for their ideas and the positive outcomes their ideas generated for the organization. Sam, who had dropped out of college to pursue a promising managerial opportunity with an expanding driving school business, experienced his older colleagues regularly take credit for his ideas:

Our idea was selected, and then about three or four weeks later, we revisited the idea we talked about, and Ethan and Ann pretty much said that that was their idea, and they expanded on it. They were like, “Oh yeah, we thought this was a good idea,” and expanded on the idea and pretty much tried to take credit for everything that Steve and I had done, which Steve and I found very interesting because Steve’s dad is Brad, and I lived with Brad, and he knew who it was.

He knew whose idea it was, but they were definitely trying to take credit for anything they could. Anything that happened good in the company, let’s say a sale. Maybe they made a sale or something like that, and Andrew and I helped out with that sale. They would take full credit. They were looking out for the self interest in fact that they wanted to make sure they received the praise and in full, in full. They would definitely kind of swoop in and say, “Yeah, that was me.” So that was kind of frustrating.

Sally’s verbally abusive coworker added insult to injury by also taking credit for Sally’s work, receiving recognition from the company president in the process:

She did, because I was there working one day and some people came in—they were guests, but they were customers of the major corporation that we worked for and they were looking for a power cord for their laptop. I was covering for her, for her lunch, and I’m like, “Well, that should be a really relatively easy question, a request. Let me see what I can do.” I was starting to make some phone calls, because I was relatively new and didn’t know exactly who to contact. I made a few phone calls to my supervisor, and then she came back from lunch and she just took the whole thing away from me and took total credit for it and got an award and a letter from the president of the company that we worked for about what great customer service she had.

ASSESSING WORK THROUGH A COWORKER LENS

Observing and assessing coworkers’ daily communication patterns and work activities was a key sensemaking activity for participants. During this process participants noticed characteristics of coworkers’ work efforts, attitudes and the overall degree to which coworkers seemed either similar or different to them in terms of both personal and work-related characteristics. Individuals also noted how others across the organization appeared to evaluate their coworkers’ behaviors, as well as how that behavior was received by the team or organization as a whole. Individual codes within Assessing Work

Through a Coworker Lens include: Dealing with Physical Distance, Questioning Work Quality, Realizing Their Biases, Seeing Others Go Unpunished, Seeing Others Let Go, Sensing Difference, and Validating My Perceptions.

Dealing with Physical Distance

This code highlights the advantages and disadvantages of working either close or far from coworkers. Forms of distances ranged from close forms of distance, such as being on different floors of the same office building, to truly distant forms of distance, such as working with colleagues in other cities, states or countries. Comments illustrated that both closeness and distance to coworkers could cause participants stress. For example, Kelly felt the physical distance her office provided was helpful in terms of getting work done, but also that the structure of her building exacerbated the social distance that existed between coworkers in various departments on site. She also enjoyed the physical distance between her location and another site across the state:

The Crawford and the Pritchett offices were really close together and so we have people moving back and forth between the two different cities and we had a lot of clients in common. Whenever we had trainings and stuff, we would always have to go together as one group, and the Crawford office is not a happy place to work. The Pritchett office where I worked was much, much better. People were friendlier, more laid back.

There was a bit of separation between the social workers because they worked upstairs and we worked downstairs doing benefit eligibility and the social workers kind of had an attitude that they were better than us because they were more educated than us. There was that kind of general attitude with them, but we didn't have a whole lot of interaction with them, so it didn't bother me. And I was so busy that I really just didn't have time to do anything else, but try to work cases and get 'em done.

Conversely, the relative closeness with colleagues also helped them keep track of—and even take care of—each other, given the high levels of emotional labor required of all state employees in the office:

On our side was DSS and on the other side it was Public Health and then on one end of the building was the Sheriff's Department and on the other end of the building was the WIC office and then upstairs was the Circuit Court. So we had a crazy mix of people that worked for state and worked for county. The Public Health nurses were always tracking us down and making sure that we got our flu shots and all of our immunizations – we couldn't hide from them.

Mary worked in Florida and her boss worked at company headquarters in New York. Although ultimately leaving the company when she was expected to move to New York, she also felt the closeness of leadership located in the New York office generated problems for her, as reported to her by coworkers co-located in the New York office:

There's other people in the office that were there that I'd known for a long time, and we trust each other and believe each other, and they would say, "Hey, Leslie — my manager — keeps on running into Laura's office and they're best friends. They're always talking." They were like, "Whatever you tell her [Leslie], I probably wouldn't trust them or believe them." And they were right. That's how I found out a lot of the stuff. I was just like, you know what, I'm just fighting an uphill battle here.

Questioning Work Quality

This code refers to situations where participants felt they could not trust the accuracy or thoroughness of their colleagues' work. In some instances, this created extra work for participants, either in trying to correct the work and/or in reporting their concerns to others. Paul grew so frustrated with the time it took him to sort through bank audit forms completed by a coworker and was so concerned about the risk being generated for their team, company and the client organization, that he elevated his concerns to his manager:

When I was asked to review one of my associate's worksheets for a particular engagement that he was on, there were at least—there were four files and I think that maybe out of eight or nine, I clearly had issues with and two, I did not agree with his risk rating where he was concurring with a past rated risk rating, which meant it was okay, when [actually] the cash flow was not sufficient to repay the loan and there was no indication in that worksheet where the cash shortfall was somehow being made up.

You couldn't tell...I just said, you know what? I can't agree with your risk rating here and that got to a point where, what's the point of even going through these things? I had a discussion with my manager about this, that, you know, this is getting a little bit crazy when there's not information in the summary comments and each of us are supposed to be providing something to justify why we're recommending the risk rating that we are.

In Kim's job as a receptionist on a large, multi-building corporate campus meant she was directly impacted by both her coworkers' lack of organization and her boss' chaotic method of scheduling, given that she regularly rotated among different welcome desks across the campus:

We have seven lobbies on the campus where I was and then three lobbies on a separate campus that we've all worked in. We were all supposed to function as a team. We all did the same job as far as how we checked people in and how it was supposed to look on the computer. It's very unorganized in that it wasn't something that they put great emphasis on. Some people were very sloppy in the way that they did things. Others were very particular and very meticulous even about the way that things were done.

Realizing Others' Biases

This code highlights instances of realizing that coworkers have a bias participants has not previously recognized. Rebecca was surprised that her colleagues, whom she often commiserated with about company bureaucracy, defended the company once she announced she was leaving the organization:

I thought that they would be like, "Oh, thank God, you're getting out." You know, that kind of prison mentality. Exact opposite. "This is a great company." And not like, "You're making the wrong decision." Nobody said something like that. I would say, "Yeah, you know, it was tiring and I was getting kind of tired of getting in that rat race over and over on the same hamster wheel." "Oh, but you know..." and they would just start defending. So, the psychology of it, I could definitely see this like – there's a reason that we're in this company and I can't believe you're leaving. It was weird. It was strange.

Shortly after starting her job, Kelly learned that a coworker's initial comments about another coworker were actually inaccurate, and in fact revealed the commenter's generally negative attitude toward others:

When I first started working there, that was what I heard from one of my coworkers, Teresa, and she's the problem causer in the office. She's the busybody that's always in everybody's business and spreading rumors and talking about everybody else and, I mean, honestly, that's not something that she should've been saying to me on my first day of work; like, "Oh, watch out for the social workers. They're snotty, they're bitchy, they're rude, they think they're better than everybody else. She dresses like a whore; things like that, because then I have this preconceived notion of how they're going to act towards me. But she [another coworker] really wasn't like that at all. It was just this situation created by the one person.

Seeing Others Go Unpunished

This code captures examples of where participants saw coworkers go undisciplined for "slacking off" or treating others in problematic, even abusive ways. Olivia perceived that newer coworkers did not share the same drive that existed in the early days of the organization, and that there were no consequences for this shift in productivity:

I think some people on my team that got too comfortable because there were so many people that were added to the organization. And it's kind of like padding to not have to work as hard, which could've been necessary that we got to that point because people were really overworked, but it got to me whenever people are checking their social networks all day or checking personal email, just not doing work.

Sally was bothered that the organization never disciplined her verbally abusive coworker for her problematic behavior:

Nothing was done. I wasn't surprised because I had heard that nothing gets done, basically. There's no repercussions for people. They don't fire people because they pay so little. And this woman also was very two-faced, as far as she was extremely nice to customers—you know, clients, visitors who came into the building—very nice to them. All of those folks thought she was wonderful, but

she was just vile to her co-workers — pushy, bossy, disrespectful, just nasty in general.

Seeing Others Let Go

This code captures examples of the sensemaking triggered when participants saw either individuals let go or witnessed rounds of layoffs impacting broader swaths of the employee population. Mary saw coworkers she felt were qualified for promotion become stuck in roles and eventually be let go by the organization, while others she felt were unqualified were promoted, a process she felt revealed a lot about what was important to the organization:

I felt that some of the managers that I had weren't even qualified to be a manager and aware of how to manage people on a personal level, with skills, with different personalities, with the work ethic and everything else. A lot of people weren't qualified to do that, but yet they became a manager. And because of that, a lot of people — and very good, talented people that had been there and had a lot of experience and knowledge — were let go. I was kind of starting to think, "Okay, so obviously that stuff is not important to the company."

Krissy saw a particularly helpful coworker be fired in an especially traumatic way:

One of our IT guys who had been there for – hmm – actually, he may have actually been there for about thirteen/fourteen years and, to me, he was the IT guy that I would go to every time I needed help because he was the only one that would actually help you whereas a lot of the other IT guys would be like, "Oh that's not my job." But he was good at helping. He was super nice and cared about everybody and asking about, you know, your family, your kids, and whatnot.

Then after – right after Christmas, this past year...he was helping my friend, my coworker, he was fixing something on her computer and it was probably like 4:50 in the afternoon and the HR guy came and grabbed him and we just thought he was coming to grab him to shut down somebody else's computer that they were letting go and, in fact, they actually let him go. Nobody understood why in the world they let him go because there was no reason, but I'm sure one of those two ladies [leaders] probably just didn't like him for whatever reason and they got rid of him.

Rather than be troubled by layoffs Lisa actually wanted to be laid off with her colleagues:

When I was there, they did do two rounds of lay-offs. So I saw people who had just gotten hired get laid right off. And I wanted to be one of those people, but I wasn't. Even before that, when I was an engineer, I saw people who would either get laid off or not get a raise. And basically there's no security. That's it. There's no security in one of those big companies.

Sensing Difference

This code highlights various ways individuals feel different from their coworkers, including attitudes toward work, treatment by the organization, and personality, among others. Emily became aware of how individuals were discriminated against based on factors of difference unrelated to their actual job performance:

Well, I learned about creating a professional image. I learned about ageism as a form of workplace discrimination because I saw it in both spectrums. I experienced being a young professional and then I saw people who were in their 60s who were discriminated against age-wise, who I was close to in the company, from the other side of the spectrum. And it made me hyper-sensitive to those issues, as well as gender discrimination.

Kim recognized that her outgoing personality was different than many of her more introverted coworkers:

Some people that just aren't personable, I guess, the same way. It takes all kinds to make the world go round. There's some that were a little more quiet, a little more timid saying hello, good morning, was a little bit more out of their comfort zone than greeting the ones that came directly to their desk and, you know, had – they had to interact with as opposed to speaking out and catching everybody.

Jack a young chef who took great pride in his profession felt like some of his kitchen colleagues did not share his commitment to cleanliness and menu innovation. He perceived that perhaps his age and less time in the profession contributed to his greater sense of urgency:

They still held the same values that I did, that we should be great, that the workers should be treated fairly, that everybody should kind of be in an environment where they could compete. I just felt like maybe my [expectations] level was a little bit unrealistic compared to theirs. They were obviously more experienced than I was, so maybe it was like they had been gradually chipped away on, where their intentions reached where they were that day.

Validating My Perceptions

This code refers to examples of when participants either asked or received unsolicited input from coworkers about workplace events or communication. This input served to either validate participants' initial perceptions or caused them to see things differently. Darren found himself explicitly reaching out to coworkers regarding his perceptions about the quality of his work, as well as the reputation of his team lead, after receiving harsh feedback from the latter:

I found myself triple checking my work....It was kind of I felt like, "Okay, if my team lead is going to be critical of my work to the degree that he is, what will other people think of it outside of our group?" So yeah, it did shake my confidence.... Partly because I was new, it took me a little while to figure out, "Okay, who can I talk to and get some honest feedback," and say, "Okay, how's my progress doing?" Trying to get 90 and 60-day informal progress tabs.

I found that two people on the sales force corroborated what I felt, that I was doing good work, but [also] that this team lead was insecure or envious, [and that] he has had issues in the past. He does tend to be political, and that's kind of how he's managed to stay there and keep his position is that he played the political games. That helped me to understand, "Okay, it's not so much my work or the quality of my work. It's my team lead's own personal hang-ups."

Rachel was initially excited to be asked by her boss to attend a trade show, until she learned her coworkers did not share her enthusiasm for such an assignment:

I had been working there two weeks, and he's like, "You're going to go to an electronics show in Vegas." And I'm like, "Whoa." I'm excited about that, because it was like, this is cool, I get to go to a trade show. But at the same time, I found out from other people in the group, like, "Oh, I'm so glad I don't have to go to that, because it's so much work." I was like, "Oh." But I thought it was

cool to be traveling for work, and then Mike, who joined shortly after I joined, said kind of the opposite.

Ron received both solicited and unsolicited input from two coworkers, one whom Ron had known since high school, regarding their shared perception that Ron's job was not a good fit for him:

I think there was one friend of mine that I made there, and then my other friend who I had known him since high school, he knew about my military career. He knew about contracting. He knew what I'm used to doing, and he's like, "This is just not for you." And I'm like, "Not really." He knew I needed the job, and I volunteered. Like, "Dude, I'm flat out. So whatever you got." In those regards, I think it was kind of a well-known thing...I wouldn't say that there was any one specific incident that led people to say certain things like that. But there was another friend that I made there. He's like, "This is just not you and I is it?" I'm like, "Not really."

EXPERIENCING OUTCOMES

In addition to navigating coworker relationships in pursuit of achieving a strong sense of membership and belonging within coworker networks and the organization as a whole, participants also used coworkers' experiences as a sensemaking device for what may be coming next within the organization, and for assessing their own status as an organizational member. Individual codes within Observing Outcomes include: Being Penalized for Their Behavior, Creating Own Systems, Feeling Caught in the Middle, Seeing them Invalidated, Sensing Others' Misery, and Seeing Them Leave.

Being Penalized for Their Behavior

This code includes examples of when participants were penalized through having privileges revoked, or being formally written up, for the problematic behavior or insufficient job performance of coworkers. Rebecca's manager prohibited listening to headphones based on problematic usage by one of her coworkers:

It's just kind of like a noisy environment. It didn't matter if I was in a cube, it was still prevalent noises from other people and I do remember, we were allowed to listen to music, but then Alicia, he has a soft spoken voice, and he tried to talk Alicia, my peer next to me, and she was jamming out too much, so he got really mad, because she couldn't hear him say her name. So, then an email went out about, "No one can have headphones on anymore." I just didn't think that was fair, because I always listen to classical music because it helps me focus and it's more soothing. I just didn't think it was fair that just because one person was reckless with their treatment of it that it meant that we all had to [stop wearing headphones].

Ron was formally disciplined when his coworker failed to correctly complete paperwork, even though Ron had fully completed his version of the paperwork:

I would do my section and leave it for him, and when we came to swap out for lunch, I would leave the paperwork for him to sign, and of course, when I leave and go to lunch and he tells me it's all done and it's stapled, then I assume that he did. Well, I actually got brought up [sic – wrote up] because they had two or three packets [without my partner's signature], my direct supervisor who was not mean in any way, shape, or form, but again, very non-personable.

Some of us had had a very straightforward talk. It's like, "You can't miss all these signatures," and every single sheet I'm looking at all of my signatures are there. I'm like, "You know that's my signature, right?" And I'm not trying to be combative about it, but I'm trying to point out the flaw in the logic. Where it's like, "Okay, well, if I did my part and you dropped the ball, why are you lecturing me? Why am I the one with the ball?"

And the honest answer is sure, I should have checked the paper to make sure both of our signatures were on there, but if obviously there's a key that the bigger problem is not me, then why are you coming after me? This was kind of just like that blind corporate mindset they did something that just did not sit well with me. Like, okay, so I'm culpable for the mistakes of everyone. I don't really get along with that.

Creating Own Systems

This code captures examples when coworkers, sometimes aided by participants, created their own systems to make their jobs easier. In some instances coworkers' creation of alternative policies was problematic, although in others it was a coping mechanism that made work a little less stressful and/or more efficient for everyone. For

example, by not fully completing the process necessary to determine eligibility for state benefits, Kelly's coworker made Kelly's already complex job more difficult and time-consuming:

You're never finished because it never ends. I mean, it's a never ending job, but what happened is like with Teresa, she would start skipping steps, like "I'm not going to narrate because I don't have time to narrate." Well, doing your narration is mandatory. You have to type up a narrative saying how you worked the case, how you figured the income, how, you know, who lives in the house, how you determined eligibility for this client. It's mandatory. You have to do it.

So, now she's got a pile of cases on her desk that need to be worked and a pile of cases that need to be narrated and within three months, I mean, she had six or seven boxes of files and piles, piles, and piles of files everywhere all over her office; stacks of paperwork, files everywhere; you can't find anything. You don't know where anything is and then it became frustrating for us because if she had a client that moved or that got married or changed their name and we needed that file or that case got transferred to my caseload because I did all of the cash cases in my office, we can't find the file.

Melanie collaborated with other teachers to devise a support system for handling student behavioral issues in the classroom because their principal would blame the teachers for problems instead of disciplining the students:

A lot of it was just talking together, trying to brainstorm ways to change things. In the time when we didn't really have a principal to turn to, a lot of us kind of created our own system of justice. That sounds so extreme, but it's not. It was the sort of thing where if we had a kid who was chronically acting up, and we knew if we sent him to the office, he'd just come right back, we'd send him to another teacher's classroom. And the student would have to remain there and do the work. Or, if someone was particularly distressed or had to break up a fight—because that seemed to be the big thing during that time, was all of us breaking up fights. It's just an emotional thing. You try to be calm about it and you get in the middle of these kids and it all comes back on you. And you're like, "Wah!"

So in times like that, we'd try to cover each other's classrooms—like, "Hey you can go home early and we'll watch," or "how about you go do this and I'll take care of the kids," and that sort of thing. It was really kind of a team spirit where if you had a kid who loved causing problems for the classroom, you could step out in the hallway and have another teacher cover your class while you had this come

to Jesus moment, “I know the principal won’t do anything to you, but I’m not going to allow it.” It was really very positive in that regard.

Feeling Caught in the Middle

This code captures instances when participants felt caught in the middle of not only coworkers, but within the complete system of relationships they had to navigate. Most examples were negative and colored by feelings of frustration and exasperation. During a merger process, Andie felt caught in the middle between her boss, a peer level executive, and the leaders of the company attempting to acquire their company:

I began feeling a little bit desperate. Desperate to try to make this merger happen no matter what it took, no matter the hours it took for me to work, no matter the resources that we had to put into it. I started feeling desperate at that time. For more than a year, we worked diligently to try to get that merger to go through. It was with another natural foods company...because of the CEOs inability to really stay focused on the project after a year of – I can’t begin to tell you the inordinate amount of work that was put into that. They pulled the plug on the merger.

As the only woman and a co-project manager on her project team, Ivy felt caught in the middle between her employer (a top consulting firm), her all male project team, and the female leaders at her client site:

Their COO was a woman. The woman who was running the project was a woman. And so I was that woman that the project leader confided in my more so than anyone else. She would tell me things that she did or didn’t like about the partners. I’m like, “Well, maybe you should tell the partner directly.” We’re not girlfriends in this scenario. It was like that weird part of dealing with women leaders that you’re like—she did her hair in a meeting with me. I was like, “Would you be doing this if I was a man? I don’t think you would. I don’t mean to be offensive, but this is unacceptable. This is not fair to me as another woman.” Like – “We’re not girlfriends, bitch. Put your fucking lipstick away. That was the moment when I was like, ‘I’ve got to fucking quit this job. Are you kidding me?’ My jaw hit the floor. I’m like, “This crazy bitch.” Like she was crazy. Then it was like, ‘I’ve got to quit this. I can’t do this anymore.

Seeing Them Invalidated

This code captures examples of when participants saw their coworkers' job-related needs ignored and their professional value disregarded. Joe saw his female colleagues invalidated both because of their gender and their role in operations, a business function not valued in the sales-focused travel business:

The father [owner], who was born in Scotland, very traditional and very much regarded the men in the office more than the women. That's one thing. I didn't quite bear as much of the issues and negativity as the ladies did on the operations side...When you get down to it, how they were treating the women in the office was something, to me, that just wasn't acceptable and not how I would have run a business.

They would hire women to do the operations side...They would never hire a woman to do sales and they would never hire a guy to do operations. It just very much felt like that. Like I said, it's very hard to prove or anything like that. But it just very much felt that they're operations. They're going to do their work. It doesn't really matter. Sales is important. We're the ones who are important. We're running the company. We're the ones bringing in the money.

Mary saw the contributions of long-term employees disregarded due to an unstructured promotion processes:

The employees, how they had been there for a long time, and they worked hard and helped the company bring them, literally from zero to saw their sales more than double. I think the work ethic, the effort the employees had put into the company, I don't think they valued that. They're like, "Okay, well, that was yesterday. Well, today is this." There was a lot of that going on. You know, with Human Resources and not having structure in the company. And just not being able to really say, "Okay, this person has done well here. We need to put them and promote them to do well here and train a team that knows to do just as well."

Nora saw her coworkers invalidated by the company's new owner, who avoided making decisions and would not listen to the questions or advice from the team responsible related to the day-to-day operations of his yacht-building business:

As a part of building a boat, there are certain parts that we have to buy here and we ship it to Taiwan. We'll buy parts and ship it to Taiwan that is incorporated in the final product. One of my coworkers is responsible for coordinating all the

purchases that go into the boat, that get coordinated and shipped out to Taiwan. So, she'll ask him questions. The supplier in Taiwan will say, "We need X materials. And we need them by this time," or whatever. So she'll go to Len [owner], "I need this information. I need to order this." He doesn't give her approval to do it. Her hands are tied. She doesn't know [what to do] – she can't make any decisions on her own. She doesn't have a budget that she can actually just go and have any autonomy to do her job. She's stuck there with her hands tied.

Seeing Them Leave

This code highlights the thoughts and emotions that participants experienced when they saw colleagues leave the organization, particularly when the participant respected the exiting individual's professional knowledge, viewed the person as a personal friend, or saw the exit as part of a larger trend in the organization. Paul noticed a large number of departures within weeks of his own exit:

We did experience some turnover as far as people leaving, but that occurred maybe in the last twelve months. Unfortunately when I gave my notice, the very next day, a manager in Minneapolis gave his notice and this all occurred. I should say, just two months prior, a manager in the Rockford office had left the company and so these were three people out of the loan review team of maybe seven or eight, so it was quite a dramatic departure of resources. One lady in Rockford had a young daughter she didn't want to do overnight travel and that was a primary reason for making that change.

Emily saw a number of her coworkers leave within weeks of a beloved leader's exit and the hiring of a troubling replacement. Because of her own modest economic background and personal financial situation, she felt leaving was not an option for her:

Pete had just proposed, so we had a wedding to pay for. And my mom's medical bills to pay for. I wasn't interested in having a lower salary. I was interested to see who they would hire to see if that person could also be a mentor, cultivate my career and that kind of thing. I was hopeful... Three or four [team mates] left immediately, put in their resignation the same week as Jim and said, "Screw this. I came here for him." But they were very – you could tell, very wealthy. Their personal financials weren't impacted. Weren't going to be. But mine were. I

didn't have that ability. And the person who they hired [to replace Jim] was horrendous.

Sensing Others' Misery

This code refers to examples of individuals becoming aware of colleagues' frustration, dissatisfaction, and even exhaustion, related to the organization's culture, structure and/or performance norms. Lisa felt the misery of her coworkers, which she felt herself as well:

On the Big Bank account, it was a very large client. The people in charge started at the top. It was very much—you're not allowed to speak—you can't, there's a few people in charge. Everybody else has to do what they say. You're not allowed to ask a question on a phone call. I don't even know how to explain it. I feel like it was soul-crushing and stifling. It made me feel like I had to revert back to being 12.

Rebecca planned to leave her job after her children reached a certain age, meaning Rebecca knew for seven years that she would eventually leave the organization. During this time, she became increasingly aware of how the stressful corporate working conditions were affecting her colleagues:

It's like having an affair almost, I would say, the whole last seven years. And it was scary too—I mean, sad and scary. I could see the—I just knew so much about the people that I was leaving and how miserable they had been in a lot of the same ways I was. And then to see those defense mechanisms come up and just notice that—I just feel like it's such a sickness at that company right now and people are feeling—I know it because they say it. But also there's also physical evidence. Some of my friends have gained so much weight over the last several years.

I know it's a lot to do with the stress and the amount of social isolation, because we're doing so much telework now and we don't have the social support. People are aging much more rapidly than they should. Smoking more and drinking—a lot of alcoholics. I shouldn't say that. You can't really call someone else an alcoholic—but a lot of alcohol. And people saying, "I need to drink. I need a drink right now"—and openly on conference calls and things like that, "Time for Vodka." I don't know, I guess that probably happens everywhere. But still, it's just—it's so

unhealthy. You just feel like you're kind of jumping off a ship that's sinking. You all have to make your own decisions.

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE ROLE OF GENDER

Although not an initial focus of this study, participants' experiences clearly reflected troubling and problematic gender dynamics in a variety of the workplaces profiled. These issues were noted by both female and male participants. Additionally, gender issues were experienced across the hierarchy, with peer-level coworkers, managers and leaders. The sensemaking and strategizing required to manage both the intra-level and inter-level gender dynamics was often an intense source of frustration for female participants in particular, and in some cases was eventually noted as one of the contributing factors to an exit decision.

Codes that detail coworker experiences rooted in gender dynamics include: Sensemaking, Structural Inequity, Treatment, and Voice. Although many of the examples noted here were discussed in previous section, an analysis through the lens of gender will highlight additional connections between gender, coworkers and exit.

Sensemaking

Female participants were both energized and disappointed by female coworkers, managers and leaders. As noted previously, Andie and Emily were disappointed by their female leaders' lack of leadership in creating the positive culture necessary to enhance the morale and move the business forward while maintaining a commitment to organizational values. Nikki was disappointed by her female supervisor's lack of technical competence related to scheduling logistics and team management. Mabel felt manipulated by her female boss, who played the role of a caring friend, then failed to advocate on her behalf to secure an increase in compensation based on her demonstrated ability to successfully fulfill two full-time positions.

Female participants' sensemaking related to gender was sometimes more implicit. Women noticed how other women were treated by the organization, specifically as related to the gendered nature of certain roles and assignments, as well as difficulties faced in relation to pregnancy and parenting. These issues were described as resulting from a combination of organizational culture factors, including sexist leadership and/or inflexible and non-existent workplace policies.

Samantha, Renee and Alyssa all worked for the same employer—a small consulting organization focused on quality and knowledge management research. Alyssa experienced the problematic pregnancy-related treatment personally, while Samantha and Renee noticed the experiences of their pregnant and parenting female coworkers, which played a significant role in their own sensemaking related to how they as women were viewed—and valued—by their employer. As noted previously, Samantha was also expected by a male leader to provide technical job training to an overly-confident, underperforming male peer to help him earn the very project assignments and promotion potential that Samantha wanted for herself.

Structural Inequity

Female participants noted differences in their treatment as women in the workplace, including being the only woman in the room, or on the team, and specific forms of tactical work and emotional labor expected of them as a result. Consultant Ivy noted that although she was co-managing a high profile project with a male fellow senior manager, all of the revenue credit for the project was given to her male peer because he managed the technical side of the project, while she oversaw the change management efforts (female-gendered Human Resources work) and daily operations (less valued tactical customer service work), including team supervision and client support. As Ivy's

case illustrates, overall women noted that they felt controlled by the stereotypical expectations placed on them as women. Because Ivy handled the female-gendered Human Resources, communications and team supervision work, she and her work were seen by the firm's male leadership as not deserving of revenue credit.

Treatment

Participants noted specific examples of treatment they received specific to their female status, ranging from subtle sexist comments to explicitly sexist treatment. Several examples were noted specific to pregnancy and women's roles as mothers. For example, as noted previously, Chloe's supervisor asked her to postpone a much-needed post-pregnancy surgery due to the inconvenience her absence would cause for the organization. Additionally, when Chloe expressed concern about not having a place to pump breast milk while working at various high school athletic events in her role as a physical therapist, her boss suggested that she simply pump from her car in the high school parking lot. Jane and her female coworkers received sexually explicit comments and looks from male coworkers in the restaurant where she worked, and Emily experienced being singled out by a senior leader who questioned her boss (in front of her) about why he had paid to bring Emily, a junior female staffer, to an important leadership retreat.

Voice

Female participants also noted specific observations about how they were treated when they tried to voice their concerns. These issues included having their concerns dismissed, after which, in some cases women devised new strategies to have their ideas heard, such as Chloe's strategy of funneling her ideas through a male colleague after realizing that her manager was discounting her ideas simply because she was the one

offering them. Alexis noted how she was silenced by her teammates through compliments—telling her they wanted to finish one final project before she left because she would do “such a good job.” Jane’s boss silenced her reports of sexual harassment by laughing them off, and Rachel’s manager told her that despite her male coworker’s condescending comments about women’s mathematical abilities, he had a “heart of gold.”

CONCLUSION

As a vital resource for the daily tactical sensemaking, coworkers play a vital role in helping each other achieve a sense of membership and belonging. Through both direct one-on-one and small group interactions, as well as observations of how their coworkers are treated by the organization, participants provided valuable insights into how making sense of coworker relationships can influence members’ sense of organizational identification and intent to stay. The next section will further underscore the importance of coworker relationships in the context of the daily work of the organization, including functional job tasks, daily communicative work, and the work required to navigate an often steady stream of organizational changes.

Chapter 9: Navigating Multiple Forms of Work

The rapid pace of work combined with uncertainty and ever-increasing demands for organizational and individual productivity, even as staffing levels and budgets are reduced, is creating new and intensified forms of work for organizational members. Additionally, the steady introduction of new strategies, team structures and technologies generates additional forms of logistical and relational work for organizational members. The combination of these factors creates an intense level of expectations on members, particularly when layered on top of the work already required to manage and navigate relationships with leaders, managers and coworkers described earlier.

Participants' narratives about the types of work they engaged in above and beyond basic task completion and/or management functions revealed three major categories for these additional forms of work: Personal Conflict with the Organization, Logistical Pressures, and Implicit Expectations. These categories are followed by a discussion of the factors that helped participants gain a sense of alignment between their personal goals and skills and the work they were doing on behalf of the organization. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the different forms of micro and macro changes participants' experienced, as well as the additional forms of work generated by these changes.

PERSONAL CONFLICT WITH THE ORGANIZATION

Personal Conflicts with the Organization experienced as a result of one's work arose from three primary sources resulting in frustration among participants which lead them to ultimately question their fit with the organization. These are not interpersonal conflicts with other members, rather conflicts that the individuals perceive and/or

experience between themselves and the organization regarding issues that are of particular significance to the individual, such as their personal ethics. Codes detailing the various sources of Personal Conflict with the Organization include: Experiencing Lack of Fit between Work and Personal Values, Experiencing Personal Conflict Due to Work, Navigating Role Expectations, and Navigating Counterproductive Work Processes.

Experiencing Lack of Fit Between Work and Personal Values

This code reflects examples of times when participants were confronted with a conflict between their personal values and their work. Former advertising specialist and college instructor, Sara, was confronted with this conflict during a community event at her school:

I remember, it was Parents Day at State U. We had all these kids in the room and we were going through a PowerPoint presentation on advertising and conceptual development. At the end, we had a little workshop and they would create their own ads. And I remember, one of my colleagues asked the students, “So, can anybody tell me what advertising is?” And one of the little kids raised his hand and he said, “It’s when companies push products on people that they don’t need.” It was the same feeling that I have so often. He had articulated it really well.

Rick noticed that his work for an accounting firm was about more than his efficiency and accuracy:

In my specific job, I ran out of stuff to do, and the other person there on the scene—I was on a two-person job at that point—she’d randomly try to figure out random stuff for me to do. How humiliating is that, just to be doing random stuff? The common sense got thrown out the window. You’re just trying to meet a certain hour requirement. It’s all about billable hours, and ultimately, how this company’s structured is you had X amount of hours to bill the client those hours, and obviously the partner gets paid more and everything else. That’s really what it got down to. It doesn’t matter what your staff did, it only matters if you’re hitting hour quotas.

Experiencing Personal Conflict Due to Work

This code captures examples of personal difficulties or conflicts due to one's work, such as hours required or coworker relationships. Rick's extreme hours made it difficult to prioritize eating healthy and exercising, two things important to him:

Once I got into the thick of busy season, that's when it kind of hit me that I don't think this is every going to slow down. I don't think I'm going to have a life outside of work. It's almost like a health risk working for that company because you're eating out. They pay for all your meals and everything, but I mean you're working from 8:00 to 5:00 and then you get a pop or something like that and work until about 7:30, eat dinner. You eat out for dinner and then you get back at like midnight or 1:00. I mean, when are you going to exercise, you know? I did try to exercise and try to stay active. You get like one or two exercises in [but] most of the week, and you're like hello? It was kind of a 'This isn't gonna work out very well.'

For Jacob, his firm's reputation for hard partying and womanizing was a source of concern for his wife:

My wife had been questioning it from the get-go because the place had a propensity for breaking up marriages. They would always have happy hours and the wives weren't invited. She didn't like that. There was a lot of cheating going on. That's her thing. Just kind of a boys club deal...I remember one time at a party, one of the principals – he may have been drinking – but my wife – one of them said, "Hey Edwards, remember the parties at Cold Creek?" "Yep." "Hot tail and no wives." My wife heard the whole thing. It made her mad. Just that kind of stuff. There's a reputation here in Denver, that that's what the deal is there, so she's talked to other spouses about it.

Navigating Role Expectations

This code reflects examples of how lack of clarity around roles on a team or across an organization generated additional issues participants had to navigate at work. John reflected on how the conflicting peer/team lead/supervisor role played by his coworker, Jeff, contributed to the ongoing tensions and isolation John faced on the job:

We really didn't have supervisors. It was a team concept. With team concepts, you really don't have supervisors, but due to their lack of understanding of the

difference between a supervisor and a team leader, there was kind of this amalgamation of team concept with a supervisor. That wasn't Bruce's doing [plant manager]. He wanted a team concept. But they [team members] didn't understand that on a team concept, everybody is equal. And then there'd be a team leader, but a team leader leads by example, not by telling you what to do and things like that.

Jane found herself navigating multiple role transitions and related expectations. Once she was promoted to restaurant manager, her informal role as an outsider in a family-owned business became a source of tension when she tried to exercise her managerial authority:

For a really long time, it was good because I didn't know he [owner] had anything to do with all of the part of the worst things that were going on there. He was actually really nice to me and then when I became manager and he started working with me and opening up a store and I saw everything that was going on, we got into really big fights about a lot of things and his brother worked there as well and it became very, very hostile very quick. Very—a lot of tension. Any time either an employee had a problem or somebody didn't show up, if I was going to write them up or get onto them and it was someone he liked, he would overrule me. That happened on more than one instance, especially with his brother and he had a cousin that works there, so I had no say over anyone that he got along with.

LOGISTICAL PRESSURES

Codes detailing the logistical pressures of ones' work environment include: Creating and Using CYA Processes, Navigating Problematic Processes & Technology, Navigating Physical Distance, and Navigating Relationships.

Creating and Using CYA processes

This code captures examples of when people created their own policies to protect themselves, generically referred as "Covering Your Ass," or CYA. Anticipating issues in submitting her resignation letter to her supervisor, Chloe collaborated with her husband to ensure the exact date of her resignation was recorded correctly:

At that point, I was angry. I was mad. I went into her office and I said, "We need to talk." She's like, "Not right now." I said, "Oh no, right now." I said, "Here's

my letter of resignation.” I’d brought it with me just in case. And right before I walked in there, I texted my husband. I said, “Email my letter to myself.” So we had the letter emailed to my home email, at the same time that I handed it to her, as a proof thing, as a backup in case she never turned it into Human Resources. I had given her three weeks’ notice at the time. Then I walked out of her office and she—she yelled at me for ten minutes. Her face was red. She didn’t even close the door to do it. I mean people in the waiting room heard.

Melanie employed a similar electronic documentation trail after being accused by her abusive school principal that she was not turning in her lesson plans as he required. In Melanie’s case, however, this additional electronic verification, like her attempts to speak up about a variety of issues at the school, was ignored.

Towards the end of the school year, I decided that I’d had enough, so I typed up my resignation letter and resigned. And the day I resigned, the day I turned it end, he chose to write me up on some bogus claim that I wasn’t turning in my lesson plans—even though I had a record in my inbox where—because we had to email him lesson plans—and because he had claimed once before that he didn’t get mine, I started doing this whole thing where I’d copy my messages to my own inbox so that I’d have a record. I could show that record that I had sent them, that they must have been received because everything else had been responded to. And I got wrote up for it [anyway].

Navigating Problematic Processes & Technology

This code reflects examples of work processes that participants’ perceived as inefficient and/or unnecessary. Lisa was troubled by being expected to read her boss’ mind:

I had another boss on that team who asked me to write a brief, which is basically a summarized strategy—a very short strategy. Like one sentence. Or three sentences. Wanted me to write a brief—it might have been the Bank of America credit card for college students or something. And I would write it. He already knew what he wanted. Nothing I wrote was right until I wrote exactly what he wanted me to write. That was (a) painful, (b) a waste of time, and it pissed me off. And it pissed him off, too.

Paul had to use a hybrid of a paper-based/technology-based system to collect information he need to complete his bank auditing work, which generated additional logistical work for his very time sensitive job:

[On] the Monmouth trip they had an image system they had changed and were converting and instead of giving us access to the image system and the database of where things were stored, this lady, the internal auditor in charge, gave us each flash drives of the file. Well, the frustrating thing about that is that they were all an Internet Explorer directory. They all had folders with certain labels on them and you'd open up a folder and there would be a whole other set of folders and you'd have to individually open up each folder and sometimes the information wasn't even there. I was constantly going back to this woman asking for the information and not on just one file, on every file that I looked at. It was cumbersome to say the least.

Navigating Physical Distance

This code refers to examples of additional logistical work required when working in a geographically dispersed organization. Kelly was frustrated by the distance she and her colleges had to travel to receive training support needed to adapt to the structural and policy changes impacting their already intensely bureaucratic daily work:

We were actually frustrated by the amount of support that we were getting because we didn't really feel like it was support. We would have mandatory training that we would have to go to, but we would either have to drive to Carver and have a video conference or we would have to drive to Wilmont for an in-person training and it would take, literally, all day, so we would have a full day where we weren't getting any work done at all because we were sitting in training and they would literally like, the people at the state office would put together a PowerPoint presentation, they would email us all the PowerPoint presentations and then we would have to sit there at the video conference and they would read us the PowerPoint presentation and we're like, "We could do these in our office." We could do this. We could read the PowerPoint presentation and if we had questions, we could email you and it would take twenty minutes, but instead we're spending all day at the training, so we're really not learning anything and so we were frustrated by that.

In contrast, Veronica appreciated the personal touch her company's owners used in managing geographically distant employees:

The owners of the company were really personal with their employees, and they treated us like family. It was a joy to work for them. They lived in New York, and whenever they wanted to have a meeting with the Texas employees, they would fly us out to New York and talk to us face-to-face, rather than emails and conference calls. I just really felt it was more personal. When we were there talking about business, they would just ask us about our personal lives and just try to get to know us better, which I thought was cool.

Navigating Relationships

Lisa felt excluded based on differences in her personal background and race compared to her White, more economically privileged coworkers:

I'm sorry I'm not the daughter of the CEO of Monster, you know what I mean? You're not going to listen to me. Fine. I just found that in marketing, it was so much more this schmoozing and who you know and who you can influence.

Darren took steps to let his boss know that he was not after his job, a perception Darren sensed his boss held, given the multiple confrontations Darren received from him:

I did respond to him, and my goal or my intent was to clear the air and let him know I wasn't gunning for his job. I just let him know that my quality of work, I hope, would reflect on him. That's something that I've always tried to do in every position I had is hope that the work that I do is a reflection on the person who hired me, or the person I report to and it would make them look better. That was my immediate response to him, was just trying to hone [sic-soothe] his fears, his nerves.

Rebecca was happy to regain a personal friendship with her boss:

My boss and I were really good friends before he became my boss. Outside [of work]. We were connected in a different way. My husband and him were good friends. It was a reorg that caused him to become my boss, which was very awkward at first because we were intimate friends. So we kind of kept that from anyone. We tried to not talk about our personal lives that we knew about each other. But at that time, he had de-friended me on Facebook. So, right after I left, we became friends again on Facebook, which was fun. That was nice to recover that relationship.

IMPLICIT EXPECTATIONS

Codes detailing the ongoing role-based Implicit Expectations related to trying to achieve what is expected of one's role compared to what one is capable of doing within organizational constraints include: Absorbing Stress, Adapting to Personal Working Conditions, Being Caught in a Role, Demonstrating Competence, Expected to be a Hero, Expected to be a Martyr, Practicing Resistance, and Seeking Validation.

Absorbing Stress

This code refers to participants' efforts to personally absorb the stress associated with their working conditions and related constraints. For Kelly, the intensely repetitive, emotionally-labor laden nature of her work as a state welfare benefits specialist, combined with the agency's limited resources, required her to "compartmentalize" the stress factors she faced on the job:

I'm a very compartmentalized person, so I think that I handled the stress level better than the other workers in my office. It was easier once the limitations in the workplace were lifted. We went through a phase where there was a hiring freeze, no overtime, anything like that, but when they lifted that and they started allowing overtime, up to twenty hours a month, then people were able to come in and work extra hours and get caught up on their caseloads when they needed to because we were doing three month re-certifications, so every three months, we would be working the same cases over and over again. Every other state has been doing six months and so our workload, basically, we would work a case and then, in three months, we would have to do it all over again.

Later in the interview, she explained how the structure of her new call center-based benefits job for another state has greatly reduced her stress and allowed her to focus all of her energy on helping them, rather than dealing with constant interruptions from coworkers and clients. Other participants suffered more extreme, physical repercussions from the stress of their jobs. Twenty-six year old Chloe began losing

patches of her hair, while working for an abusive leader led thirty year old Emily to fear she was having a heart attack:

I find a lot of worth and value and I get a lot out of work. I draw from my work as an energy source. I don't see it as an energy drain. Unfortunately, it was a complete drain on me when Erica took over. And that time period, it was a complete drain. I had anxiety, panic attacks. I told Joe (fiancée) one time as I was driving home to go next door to CVS and buy aspirin because I was having a heart attack. I really thought I was having a heart attack. I [also] lost a lot of weight, which was good because we were getting married, but I wasn't eating properly. I wasn't taking care of myself. I was going to bed really early because I just had no energy to interact with friends. It was a complete drain on my life. And so when I got accepted to the PhD program at State U...it allowed me to go to work unattached, to do my job and to go home without feeling the negative consequences seeping in.

Jean began experiencing multiple health complications related to her diabetes as a result of her the intense travel schedule and the stress caused by an fellow leader's ongoing attempts to sabotage her work:

I'm having neuropathy, which is brand new to me and some other neurological problem that hasn't been identified yet and other things. I'm actually going back to the Mayo Clinic again next week to try to sort out these layers of different issues on top of each other that are causing me to have a bunch of generalized pain and that's keeping me from sleeping at night and interfering with a lot of other things. They think that I have severe carpal tunnel syndrome and degenerative joint disease and they're testing me for Celiac disease... Since I've only been working two days a week and I haven't been travelling very much in the last two months [pre-retirement work arrangement], I've seen a HUGE improvement. My long-term diabetes numbers have gone down twenty-five percent, which is phenomenal. So I definitely can see improvements in that area. And the biggest difference I made was I quit my job.

Adapting Personal Working Conditions

This code captures examples of how participants attempted to adapt to working conditions that were problematic for them. Working within an open concept office, Rebecca would come in early to get work done before her colleagues arrived and

everyone's phones started ringing with client calls. Alyssa found that the open office concept office environment, combined with the isolated location of her desk, led her to talk even less than she normally would as a private person:

The location of my desk was behind the pole, away from that pod of three. Three people on the team are sitting together within five feet of each other in all directions. And then I am 15 feet away, behind a pole. People just easily forgot that I was even there...[also] there's no office, there's no wall. Conversation is loud. I think people in this environment try to limit their conversations and keep it quiet because everybody else can hear. If you're like, "Oh my god! I went out last night and I was so sick. I was so drunk." Everyone in the entire office would know. So you don't want to do that. And I tend to be slightly a bit more private and not want to share too many details of what's going on. There's a number of factors.

Kelly turned off the lights in her office to avoid becoming the default secretary given her location close to the front lobby of her office, a strategy which unexpectedly served as another source of conflict for Kelly:

Because I had windows in my office and the bright fluorescent lights hurt my eyes - and my office was right up front next to the lobby - so clients were constantly like, if somebody was up front talking with the receptionist instead of waiting their turn, they would walk into my office to hand me papers or to ask me questions or whatever, so I was constantly being interrupted by clients. I found that if I turned my light off, even if my door was open, if I turned my light off, they wouldn't come in and for some reason that bothered her [coworker]. I had my light off, so then she was like calling me names, "Kelly just sits in the dark like a mushroom" and blah, blah, blah and I could hear her.

Being Caught in a Role

This code refers to feeling either stuck doing work that one does not want to be doing, or constrained by specific dynamics within the organization. John felt constantly trapped by both implicit racism and explicit exclusion he received from his tight-knit group of White colleagues:

I don't think he [operations manager, Bruce] knew the dynamics that Jeff was a good 'ole boy. I think that Bruce handpicked everybody based on how they was

going to get along. And he even asked me, when I came, he said, “Listen. You got some boys from Indiana here. Do you think you can work at an all-white company?” Because I was the only black there. I said, “I can work in it as long as you make sure everything’s going to be alright.” He says, “You got my word. I don’t play that stuff.”

So on the one hand...I didn’t want him [Bruce] to feel like I was constantly always nitpicking. Because it was hard to say what was going on. You understand what I’m saying? It was really hard to come to him and say, “Well – the only thing I can say is that Jeff’s not training me.” But I couldn’t tell him the nuances of his racism [either], his little remarks and things like that because I’m a professional, too. I didn’t want to make it seem like I was just being a nitpick-y little – you know. You understand what I’m saying? I couldn’t put it down. I couldn’t – and that’s the thing about racism. It’s so subtle that you could easily – if you can’t prove it, you can’t prove it then you going to seem like you a nitpicking little girl or that you’re hard to get along with and stuff like that. Overall, we had an awesome team down there.

Lisa felt trapped and frustrated by a role in which she could not fully utilize her capabilities, and attempts to do so were overtly thwarted by some of her managers:

I remember when I realized that to be inside a bureaucracy my skillset and the actual job – the way it was at that group – wasn’t really gibing. I was asked to do some sort of comparison between BigBank and a few other banks, between their ads. And I took to it and really wanted to compare like numbers. I was trying to find numbers in comparing the amount of calls to action. I was trying to get as numerical and quantitative as I could. But then when my boss saw it, she was like, “What? I just need...” She just needed me to paraphrase everything for her into a two-slide thing – a two-slide whatever. She just wanted me to paraphrase it. I realized that that’s not what I want to do. I don’t want to just work in a place where I’m just doing that type of grunt work – I can do so much more. I put all this time in trying to [do more] – it would get me in trouble. I felt like I was always trying to overdo it or overachieve. I was always given these small, menial tasks and try to go overboard, and I would get in trouble for it.

Demonstrating Competence

As a young school psychologist traveling daily between multiple schools in her district, Nicole had to devise strategies for not only communicating her expertise in initial meetings with teachers and principals, but also strategies for reinforcing her recommendations and ensuring that her recommended plans were actually implemented

once she left the school (rather than disregarded due to time constraints or parental requests):

I would, go in and do some observations [of the student] and then usually, an ABC - Annotated Behavior Consequence - kind of observation and go in and say, “Okay this is what the behavior was. This is what happened before. And this is how it was responded to.” And kind of compare and contrast how that went along with the intervention that they were setting out to do. Or the [observed] differences and how it coincided with the plan and then point out some of the things that maybe could have been changed to see more positive behavior – that was one way.

I think they realized that they couldn’t just push “we’re doing it already” —they know that I’m there really paying attention and being there and trying to help. Overall, I think it was helpful and went over well. There might be times when people were a little more sensitive to getting feedback from someone. But for the most part, that kind of interaction or meeting with them, after going to sit in and kind of providing different suggestions about things would be the most helpful.

Marty had to take a more assertive approach to convince his native Korean CEO to begin making decisions not based on what he had always done before, but based on what Marty’s recommendations for positioning the company for future success—the reason the CEO had hired Marty in the first place:

Well, it made it challenging because their vision [existing leadership team] of business was what they had done. They had not seen a business perspective from a customer side or from a competitor’s side and so it made it very difficult. They were very loyal to the founder who was my boss, but their boss as well, and anything that I tried to enact, if they didn’t like it, they would go over my head and tell him, “This is not the way we do business.” I would have to go into [to explain] my course of action constantly, initially, to, ‘If you want to change, you want to build your business, here’s the things you have to do.’

...It was also sort of a radical departure from the business that he’d run. It wasn’t radical, but it was obviously a different way of doing business, and some things he would embrace and some things, it’s kind of the old culture that “This is the way I’ve always done business, so why do I want to change it?” “Don’t you want to grow your business? Then, these are the things you need to do.” Sometimes he would agree, sometimes he wouldn’t. Once our business began to grow and we got new customers, new major customers, and larger businesses, our business in

five years quadrupled, so there was certainly a massive uptake in business fairly quickly and as we were producing results, his attitude towards change changed a lot.

Expected to be a Hero

This refers to being expected to do all the work typical for your role and a potentially unlimited amount of additional work—while navigating the risks associated generated by an excessive workload. Luke commented that he was “expected to be a hero” given the lack of supervisory guidance or support, his immense workload, and the safety issues he worried could result in severe personal injury for him and his peers:

The supervisor, manager, they don't put their hands on anything. They manage, supervise. And they were very incompetent, unreliable and didn't seem to know a lot themselves...And they just didn't seem to care whether the work environment was safe or unsafe. They just didn't care. They just wanted the work done and when the work didn't get done they just—everyone's expendable and they didn't seem to be expendable because they would always blame the employee for 'it wasn't done' even though they did not manage or supervise because they were never around. They would just put in part time hours and if something was not done they didn't look at it as they didn't do a good job managing. They look at it as the employee just didn't get the work done.

After a round of budget cuts due to state funding issues, Mabel fulfilled the duties of two full-time administrative assistant positions for the salary of one—and then found out that other assistants with a much smaller workload had been making several dollars more an hour than her during this period of time:

I did a lot of work—a lot of cuts were made from the school district employees and on top of me being the new superintendent's secretary, they gave me the secretarial role of career technology. That is a full-time position in itself, so I was working two full-time position. I created over in one year over 900 PO's for career technology. I felt like my workload was overloaded. I did it very well. I managed for a budget. I managed the purchase orders, phone calls. I managed teachers, their student travel. I managed my deputy superintendent: got her meetings, got her set up, had what she needed, letters, correspondences, emails, faxes, everything for her travel. I felt that I did that very, very well.

Expected to be a Martyr

This code captures examples of where participants were expected to selflessly sacrifice their own time or needs in order to focus on the organization's goals or needs. Lisa regularly faced the decision of whether or not to speak up on behalf of minority customers and coworkers and reported feeling like she was in a problematic bind:

How do I approach this [speaking on behalf of minorities] and not—but you know, it was uncomfortable – at the end of the day, that's fine. You can think of me as the overly-sensitive black person now. Just—I felt like I had to become a martyr. I don't think it necessarily ruined my reputation, but I did think about that when I had to [speak up] —it was like a risk factor I took into account.

After the birth of her daughter, Chloe's manager asked her to pump breast milk from her car while working remotely, and her female supervisor asked her to postpone a much-needed post-birth surgery because of the inconvenience of having her miss work. After her boss lost her job and had to fire her housekeeper, nanny Michelle was expected to take on housekeeping tasks in addition for caring for twin baby girls without any additional pay. She also frequently kept Michelle past her regularly scheduled hours, even though she knew Michelle was taking evening college classes. Rather than continue to martyr herself, Michelle eventually asked for money for the extra work and hours:

Well, she was frustrated, but in the end understood. I talked to her about it and then she went in the other room and talked to her husband about it and came back and kind of said, "How much money are you looking for?" I explained to her due to the long days, you know, nine, ten hour days as well as taking care of the babies and cleaning and all of that..She just kind of said, "Well, you know, it's not in my budget with my new job, so I'm going have to say that I am going to let you leave." It was kind of rude, and I said, "Well, you're not going find another nanny who's going do it for anything less, I promise you." And she ended up coming back to me a couple months later and saying, will you come back [without additional pay], and I had already found another job.

Practicing Resistance

This code refers to examples of when participants openly and directly resisted problematic practices by their employer or specific colleagues. Lisa chose to speak up to educate her colleagues about an implicitly racist advertising slogan they were crafting:

It was a corporate ad, because we were sponsoring something. I think it was the Diversity Digital Network. We were basically sponsoring something there. The headline on this one page ad was “Deleting Old Assumptions. We’re proud to partner with Digital Diversity Network.” Deleting old assumptions. When I saw that, I’m like, “What assumptions are those? Whose assumptions are those?” It just came across like inappropriate and racist. Those assumptions. And having to explain that to the creators was difficult. But I did it and they ended up changing it—well, actually they ended up doing an alternate and showing the client both. And they chose the other one. The appropriate one.

To avoid personal liability, Louise refused to sign paperwork implying that her company took steps to fully protect customers’ identity by shredding paperwork with customer’s names on it, when in fact they did not shred personally-identifiable information:

They tried to make me sign a policy and procedures paper saying that I had read this book and that I agreed and that I complied with all the policies and procedures where one of the policies and procedures was that they shredded anything with personal information from a customer on it and we didn’t even have a shredder in the store. I outright refused to sign it. I was like, “I’m not having this come back on me to have somebody storm into the store and say somebody stole my identity out of your trashcan and me just like standing there,” saying, “Oh, but I signed this paper saying I’d do this,” you know? And so I wouldn’t sign it and I said, “Type me up a letter stating that I refused to sign it and I’ll be happy to sign that” and never heard about the policies and procedures or the letter again.

Seeking Validation

This code refers to examples of looking for others inside or outside the organization to validate the value of the work you do. The absence of this validation, and

particularly receiving negative comments about one's work instead, was a particular source of frustration for participants.

When I would tell people that I work for DSS doing benefit eligibility, you would either get the people who were extremely interested and wanted to know about the programs and how they work and what we do and appreciate what we do and how we help people. And then there was the opposite end of the spectrum: the people who think, "Oh, it's welfare, welfare recipients are lazy, they don't work, they don't go to school, they're not educated, they are lazy, they don't want to do anything to better themselves." And they complain about federal requirements to the program and illegal aliens and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. I get super irritated with people like that.

Melanie hoped for validation of the value of her work from her school principal, who instead constantly berated her and other teachers:

There are certain state standards that I had to address. But even when it was something boring, I tried to make it interesting because I know there's stuff out there that's not interesting, like grammar. Ugh. Who cares? So we would try to make it interesting, make it fun, make it into a game and bend over backwards to reach kids. And for him to say, "You're just not doing enough," made me realize that my values didn't align with the school's because I was killing myself for nothing. I still love my kids, so I shouldn't say for nothing, because I had a great relationship with the majority of my students, and I still hear from the majority of them. I just couldn't work in that environment any longer...And so, at a point, I just thought, 'If you want more than what I'm already giving, it's time for me to leave teaching.'

SOURCES OF ALIGNMENT

In addition to the challenges faced when formal organizational structures were lacking or problematic, participants also detailed sources of alignment and support related to their professional growth, personal values and work-related satisfaction. Codes detailing this alignment include: Able to Work Autonomously, Connecting with People, Doing Challenging Meaningful Work, Drawing Strength from a Memorable Message, and Experiencing Supportive Structure.

Able to Work Autonomously

Jeremy took great pride in reinvigorating his company's sales function, progress that was quickly destroyed when a new leader was hired that did not share Jeremy's focus on people and culture:

We had pretty much accomplished all the goals that I was originally brought in to do. Because of that my business unit #1 in the organization. We grew by over \$1 million in net new revenue, about 23% growth...For me, that was very exciting because not only was I able to impact revenue, but I was also to hire a team of people, teach them the business, help them learn, develop and grow. And then also, change the culture of the business from literally waiting for the phone to ring, which is very old mentality, to being hunters and going out and finding business and helping clients.

Anne enjoyed the autonomy she had in solving problems and helping families:

Part of why I liked that job so much is kind of from where I came from, from teaching and in the school system. When I switched over, I just felt like I had a lot more to say in what I was doing and how I was able to support the family. I had more autonomy with my job, with what I was doing, and how I was interacting with the families. We have policies, just like in any job. There's red tape that you have to cut through and there's paperwork that's not fun. But as far as the job itself, from the very beginning, I was very satisfied with it.

Connecting with People

This code refers to the energy and enjoyment participants felt when connecting with customers and/or coworkers, which clearly served as a source of balance for participants when dealing with difficult organizational situations. Despite problematic management and leadership throughout her tenure, she always enjoyed helping her physical therapy clients:

I just like working with people, hands-on. And I like helping people. That's a big part of my personality is I just love helping people, so this job is perfect for me because that's what I get to do all the time. I'm always helping somebody.

As a new 19-year old manager, Sam enjoyed building relationships with his subordinates:

I just wanted to come in and I wanted to make sure that they knew I was here to work with them, not above them. I never wanted them to feel like I was above them. I always wanted to make sure that I was leading in a way that people would want to follow, and especially dealing with age [differences]. I knew that was going to be the hardest thing coming in. I just wanted to make sure that I was on a, not a friend level with them, but at the same time, find common ground.

For Ivy, the bonds formed with her leader and teammates made a tough client project one of the most meaningful experiences of her career:

I was connected on a team of 12 women and one guy. And we were at this client that was a tough client. I ended up being there for a little over two years. But formed really good relationships with the women on this client and even though the work was really tough and sometimes the client was a huge pain in the ass. The team that was there, and the leader of that team, [it was] one of those projects and those groups of people that you never forget in your career...It was one of those sort of trial by fire situations. Tough work, long hours, I was commuting an hour and a half each way every day. Long, exhausting, but good because I was able to use a lot of the stuff that I had just learned and had my MBA, and put it to work, and expand on it.

Doing Challenging Meaningful Work

Alison recognized that, particularly for students with limited financial resources, the learning supports she provided were critical to their ongoing development:

I definitely enjoy working with children and working with parents. I take a lot of enjoyment in working in the schools. My philosophy, I feel like a lot of kids that don't get psychological services or any type of therapy—it's harder [for them]. You have to have a lot of resources to get those. So a lot of kids, the only place where they can get those are in the school setting. I enjoy reaching different populations that might not have access to services otherwise.

Joe was initially excited by working for a small family-owned business, expecting a combination of close teamwork and the type of work he would be doing:

From what I could see, the employers—it was a small team, so it was a lot of interacting with the bosses, with the owners, which I liked. I thought there'd be a lot of opportunity for input and things like that. On the outside it looked, it seemed like a very good fit because it was something I was passionate about—the culture and the small environment was also a great thing. And just to kind of

marry that with some of the things I had done before as far as sales and helping people—things like that.

Similarly, before being made to feel like an outsider, Lisa enjoyed the actual work she was doing, particularly because of the professional opportunities she was given as an intern, before transitioning to a full-time position:

It was tons of fun. I loved it. When I first got there, I was actually an intern – that was my first job there. I’m graduating from UT’s graduate program. And I was an intern, but more importantly, I was on a team on Gillette. So there was a team of three gentlemen, who were the planners. I worked with them. And we had—it was crazy. They did not treat me like an intern at all. Believe me, we were just—we were doing brand work for Gillette, a lot of innovation work, future thinking. Thinking, ‘Okay, how can we make the razor more green?’ You know they sent you to retreats with the clients from all over the world and we were doing a lot of brainstorming. So that was fun...

They didn’t ever want me to tell them I was an intern. They didn’t want me to tell them I was intern because they weren’t treating me like an intern. At first I was shocked. At first I was surprised. I go, “Okay.” But it made me feel like I wanted to work harder, do a better job and like impress them. It made me want to work harder.

Drawing Strength from a Memorable Message

This code captures examples of memorable messages that provided helpful, emotional sustenance during difficult times at work. Sara realized that the inspirational career-related message she shared with her college students every semester was one that she was ready to follow herself:

As I am hearing myself talk, I knew that I was telling myself this. And so there was something that I would say at the end of every semester’s lecture for this one class I taught. And I would say on the very last day, “If you remember nothing else from this semester, remember these six words.” And I would say, “Leap and the net will appear.” But even then, I was telling myself that.

For Ivy, an internal video produced by the company to inspire employees prior to a significant change in business strategy:

When we were thinking about spinning off [into a separate company], there was a video about climbing Mt. Everest. It was basically saying your consultants are akin to your sherpas. That still sticks with me that the concept of being someone's Sherpa, at a client site. That's a metaphor that's helped me throughout all of it. Because you've got a big fucking thing that's gone wrong, that's hard to do. I'm just here to help. I don't want your glory. That's yours. I'm here to help you be successful. I'm successful if you are. I don't need to be on the—I'll be on the summit with you, I'll be right behind you. But you're going to get the photos and the press, because that's the way it should be. A good consultant does that. So, that sort of stuck with me, like this is a hard job because of that. You don't get famous. But you know, that's one of those things you're there to help. And if you're a helper and a problem-solver, you're good at this job.

Experiencing Supportive Structure

Rebecca described the practices her company, Pedigree, had in place to connect people and celebrate accomplishments prior to being acquired by a much larger multinational technology company.

It had tons of benefits. I was young. They had lots of social things. The socializers, like actually Happy Hours, beer on Fridays. Those kind of things. Parties every time we launched something. Prizes. Trips to Hawaii. Whatever out of a lottery. It was really nice. And they spent a lot of time making sure people got to know each other. That's what I liked about Pedigree.

Sue spoke of the extensive training she received after starting her job as a neonatal intensive care unit nurse at a top university:

It was about four months long and you would go in for classroom time, which we'd go through various lectures, hitting specific illnesses, pathophysiology, and basically what you see in the NICU [neo-natal intensive care unit] that were commonly occurring, along with respiratory management of different ventilations and medications. Essentially it's kind of like a compacted form of nursing school, except in specifically NICU targeted topics.

Those were long days, but I was in class with about five other girls who were about my age and they were all awesome people that we got to all be very good friends, and so it made the class a lot more enjoyable. I think the foundation that they set for me, in terms of a NICU education, really set me up for success because after leaving the job

and moving onto my next one, I think that I was at a greater advantage and feeling comfortable in the neonatal ICU. I think the education program at Harris compared to my new hospital was just miles ahead of anything I've seen and it helped me in grad school as well, so I was very happy with it.

CHANGE AS WORK: NAVIGATING THE IMPACT OF CHANGE

In addition to completing the technical requirements of one's job, today's rapidly changing workplaces require ever-increasing levels of additional forms of work from employees, including change management (Lewis, 2011), navigating abusive workplace relationships (Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott, 2008), emotional labor (Mumby & Putnam, 1992), making sense of ambiguities (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005), and developing resilience (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007). As revealed by the experiences of participants, organizational members are often working through many of these issues, in pursuit of completing their daily job responsibilities and achieving the performance levels and productivity expected of them. A list of types of change—of which participants often reported experiencing simultaneously or in rapid succession, magnifying the intensity of the changes—highlighted by participants appears below:

Table 8: Types of Change

| Types of Change | Definition |
|-------------------------|---|
| Change as the Norm | Experiencing—and sometimes explicitly recognizing – that ongoing change is how one's organization operates based on its history and/or industry. |
| Change to relationships | Experiencing change to relationships with other individuals in the organizations; may also result in perceiving change to one's relationship with, or value to, the organization itself |

Table 8: Types of Change (continued)

| | |
|---|--|
| Dealing with Rapid Growth | Experiencing rapid organizational growth while moving out of a start-up phase, or simply being a new organization experiencing growth generated by intense levels of customer demand |
| Leadership Change | Seeing one or more changes to leadership; observing and experiencing the impact on the organization. |
| Manager Suddenly Quits / Is Fired | Seeing one or more manager(s) leave the organization voluntarily or involuntarily; observing and experiencing the impact on one's work and workplace relationships, and on the organization as a whole |
| Merger/acquisition | Being acquired by another company, typically a much larger and more bureaucratic organization, requiring additional forms of work |
| New technology | Introducing one or more new technology systems into the organization, impacting the way work is done |
| Personally initiating change | Personally initiating and implementing a change to the organization; most typical for those in leadership positions |
| Physical change | Opening or closing of organizational facilities, physically restructuring existing structures or work arrangements (close building, open office concept) |
| Shift in business strategy or structure | Navigating the introduction of new policies, processes or procedures that impact how one's daily work is to be done. Changes in business priorities, including new products, new customer types. |
| Stability- No change | Organizations that are stable, and even stagnant, representing instances where participants reported wanting things to change in some way. |
| Unqualified people promoted | Assessing the merit and qualifications of those who receive promotions; inferring what the promotion of "unqualified" people signals about the organization's values and priorities |

Change Effects

These changes generated a number of specific effects that influenced participants' workplace relationships, productivity and satisfaction. Codes detailing these Change Effects include: Dealing with Emotional Turmoil, Everything Stays the Same, Losing Autonomy, Managing Resistance, Navigating Dismantled Teamwork Processes, Receiving Warning/Guidance, and Scrapping and Scrounging.

Dealing with Emotional Turmoil

This code refers to examples of absorbing the emotional impact of organizational change, either because of the trauma of the change itself, or the emotional work necessary to continue one's daily work in the face of change. For Alison, a rapid series of leadership changes, including the unexpected death of a leader, created waves of emotional turmoil for her and her teammates, as they had to find ways to absorb and cope, while performing their daily work functions:

Within the course of about two and a half months, we had three different coordinators just because of unforeseen circumstances. I think that, again, it just kind of added to – it was just everybody knew it was a very stressful time and everybody was having a lot of emotional difficulties with her passing and just a lot of things going on. I think that I and a lot of other people just took that as, “Let's just hold down the fort, keep our schools as calm as possible and we'll do what we know how to do and then maybe as things settle, then we'll begin to receive more guidance about everything.”

Similarly, Emily and her colleagues experienced rapid waves of change, including adapting to an abusive new leader after the firm's previous beloved leader exited the organization, followed in rapid succession by the surprise of being acquired by a large global technology company:

Right before I left—so the reason I said I was promoted – there was a glimpse, a glimmer of hope because driving into work one day, I turn on the radio and I found out on the radio that our company had been acquired by Dell. On the radio. I would advise them for better communication, internal communication—no employee should find out through public announcements that their company has been bought out for like \$7B from GlobalTech—or \$3B—I think it was \$3.4B from GlobalTech. I got to work that morning and there's like a GlobalTech sign hanging in the atrium of the building. And they had donuts and coffee and people in GlobalTech shirts and khaki pants welcoming us as part of the team.

[I was] Blindsided. Dumbfounded. More confused because we were already in so much turmoil. I was like, “Is GlobalTech just going to fire everyone in this building after we eat our donuts?” ...[then] I thought, ‘I might even be able to transfer.’ There was this glimmer of hope that maybe there was a new opportunity.

Everything Stays the Same

This code reflects participants' experiences related to the old adage the more things change, the more they stay the same. Here, participants reflect on the realization that in spite of changes to roles, structures and performance expectations, the organization's culture and values—often problematic for these participants to begin with—remain the same. For Alison, a school psychologist, the diversity of her job requirements made it difficult for her to introduce the relatively small changes she felt would help the students and teachers she supported in her daily work:

So it was hard, even though I tried to do that as much as I could, it was hard to still keep doing all of the roles that are expected of me, while also trying to plant seeds and do something a little bit different at the school, too. There just wasn't enough time involved. There weren't enough hours in the day to do everything that I wanted to do. So, I guess, going back to your original question, that was the values difference, the philosophy difference. I kind of felt like, 'I'll see if things are starting to change or is this kind of going to be my role forever.' And it didn't really seem like any change was going to happen imminently, so I kind of knew, 'I don't know if I can continue to do something that I don't necessarily support 100%.' If that makes sense.

Paul felt like even though his job required him to be in a different physical location on a weekly basis, the experience of his work was equally unsatisfying and frustrating:

I got tired of the travel. I got tired of doing the small towns and, as I referred to them, the garden capitals of Illinois. I recognized that I probably should have recognized this before I even accepted the position that I need a certain amount of consistency in my work-life. I would jokingly say, "Okay, what week is this? What bank are we at? What policy is in place and what advance rates and what's their risk rating?"

For Lisa, despite two rounds of layoffs and other changes within the organization, the values did not change in the way she hoped, as one of only a few persons of color in a large advertising agency:

It was—okay, people were nice. It was good. But it was—what’s the word I’m looking for—disheartening or – it just made me feel like, gosh—nothing’s really going to change. Unless somebody makes something change, there’s nothing that’s going to change...It’s just apathetic. I don’t know what it’s going to take to make an industry change. The people were nice. I guess the reason why it was so disheartening is because the people had been on the [diversity] council for years, who had been working at the agency for 20 years, they were disheartened and disillusioned. They didn’t even think that anything was really going to change.

Losing Autonomy

This code refers to the frustration of losing decision-making authority as a result of change, typically in the form of additional rules or scrutiny coming from higher in the organization. Jerry lost the autonomy to make decisions once the start-up he launched with two partners was acquired by another company:

Well, instead of devoting 100% of my time to finding ways to grow the business, I would say 50% or more of my time was devoted to explaining the business to numerous parts of the company. A lot of it had to do with our financials – we were in charge of generating the financial statements for the company, but in many ways, the accounting team, finance team at the larger public company—it impacted their financial statements. This is so complex...We weren’t able to make the best decisions for the business as if it was a stand-alone business because there were so many elements of their business that were impacted by decisions that we made.

So, instead of plowing forward, making the best decisions and moving forward, it was making decisions and then trying to justify them, then getting the feedback, then negotiating, then trying to come to a conclusion. So much time was spent justifying decisions and discussing whether we could make these decisions. In many ways, we had been neutered, I guess would be a good way to describe it, from making our own decisions. I think that they were trying to assert that they were in charge here.

Anne, a special education coordinator, experienced an intensified focus on teamwork after new State regulations required more student-care decisions be made and approved by the student’s entire school-based care team, rather than by individual care providers acting based on their individual interactions with the student:

It all came down from the State level. The way they described it to us was that it was to ensure that the family's rights were being upheld and that the family had an IFSP [Individual Family Service Plan] team and that the IFSP team is who, as a group, made decisions...It seemed like a lot of rigmarole to get this whole IFSP team together just to say, "Yeah, we do have a concern about language. Does everybody agree? Is everybody okay that we add that to the plan?" And if everybody agreed, then we officially have it on the paperwork, on the IFSP team – everybody has to physically be there to sign the paperwork together, in person, to have that ink on that plan.

And then the evaluation would happen. And then the IFSP team would have to re-gather after the evaluation to review the results...I had frustrations with it, the red tape and the paperwork and some of the loops that you eventually had to start jumping through, to get support for families. It would take a long time and a lot of work when as a service coordinator, I'm like, "We can have somebody in here helping this family right now. And instead, it's taking a couple of weeks to get to that."

Managing Resistance

This code refers to asking and answering questions about the value or purpose of one's work, sometimes as a form of basic work coordination, and sometimes as a form of outright resistance. Jerry found himself having to spend time to help his new parent company understand his business and how the parent could maximize its profitability:

There was one specific time which related to a discussion on the useful life of a solar panel. And the ability to generate a return on that asset depended on the life for some depreciation and tax purposes. The partner [new parent company] kept arguing for a shorter life, which hurt their own economics and investment in the business. I found myself in the peculiar element of arguing for something that would make more return on their business and they were arguing for something that would make less return on their business. It was just frustration that they couldn't see a larger picture. And basically stunning that they would argue for less return on their investment.

Chase and his new hire cohort managed their resistance by asking and answering each other's questions about their initial, unexpected and chaotic experiences on the job (Chase transitioned teams three times within the first few months):

A lot of us didn't really know what we were getting into when we interviewed, just because the company is so large and it's so vague as to what you're actually going to be doing. A lot of us just kind of talked about, you know, "Do you like what you're doing?," "Is it what you expected?," "Is this what you went to college for?," "Are you using your degree in any way?," "Do you feel that working here is going to help you get a better job in the future?," "How long do you plan to stay here?." Just kind of talking on a friend level I guess—that kind of helped a lot of people out, especially those that were aggravated by the team that they were on or the client that they were on.

Navigating Dismantled Teamwork Processes

This code refers to examples of how change disrupted existing teams, in ways that negatively impacted operational efficiency and member satisfaction. For catering coordinator, Andrew, a new leader divided teams based on who they reported to and what their job title was, which dismantled the informal teamwork that had previously operated across these formal boundaries:

We did caterings in the morning and so I was used to showing up at like 6:00 a.m. and we'd go drop all the orders off. I'd drop my last order off at like roughly 2:00 or 2:30 and then I would go back, clean up all the things that were ready to clean up and then I'd go home. Then because I was off somebody from the night shift would help pick up our responsibility and go clean up the order at like 5:30 or 6:00 p.m. or so. That had to be cleared by Percy who was the owner. That was how it worked for a long time.

Then we picked up the new owner. We were planning to do that one day. I'd been there since 5:30 in the morning and it was like 2:30 and no one came...The new manager was like, "No —these aren't your employees. They aren't there to help you, I am their boss and they're not helping you at all and never again." So, they were like taking ownership of different employees and people were renting out employees' help and then they wouldn't let them do it.

Jim, a Texas-based software engineer, whose entire office was transitioned to a work from home arrangement shortly after he joined a California-based company, felt isolated and alone based on this physical change, as well a constant flow of leadership changes:

I had a total of seven bosses in four years. I had bosses that I had never met face to face. Talked to them on the phone, but never met them face to face. Eventually, I did end up meeting those people, but it would take a long time before I would meet them, knew who they were... There were occasional business trips to either a client site or the home office. I went there a few times. It's weird not knowing if someone is younger, older. Don't know what they look like. It's strange.

Receiving Warning/Guidance

This code captures instances where participants received warnings—and even new opportunities—s a result of organizational change. Chris was warned by his managers that layoffs may be coming and then was assisted in finding a new position in another area of his large global technology company:

It came from two levels above. Basically, my manager was involved in a meeting with all of his other new managers, and they communicated to their engineers, their direct reports, that —they essentially asked us to update our resumes and email it to them with our skill sets because they were looking at the business environment right now, the marketplace, and said, “Look, it’s not looking good.” They proactively were gathering people’s credentials and trying to look internally, within the company, and trying to position and find openings for people so they wouldn’t have to lay anybody off.

This was for everybody. It wasn’t just for me. This was more of a facet of the senior leadership within that team. They had to be a little more people oriented. MobileTech’s obviously a very large company, so it varies a lot. It really depends upon who the senior management is. I’ve heard of other cases where people get laid off, and they didn’t even know they were on the chopping block. It doesn’t happen all the time. I was just fortunate to be in an organization that had senior leadership that actually cared about the engineers and the individuals.

Chase got moved to a new manager after being on the job for only a few weeks. She encouraged him to pursue a valuable opportunity in the company, one he would have otherwise not realized the significance of, given his status as a new organizational member:

So [now] I fell under another direct manager, and that direct manager saw another place for me to grow. She wanted me to go to that client instead. After that happened, a position opened within another client and they needed extra help.

And so she kind of sat down with me and just said, “You know, this would look great to leadership and I think you should really do it. It’s a great growing opportunity for you.” I don’t think it’s really typical because not many of the new hires had to do that. I just agreed to it and did it because what she said—that it would look good to upper management and I was hoping to grow my career in that organization and stay for a while. I was trying to do anything that would help me out in that aspect.

Scrapping and Scrounging

This code refers to examples of specific instances—and larger cultural themes—regarding the need to “do more with less” job-related resources. Ryan heard both direct and implied versions of this message when funding became an issue for his government-based agency:

A lot of it was upper management, like our managers and supervisors, when we would have team meetings or department-wide meetings, and they would kind of update us on what was going on. They sat us down to talk about the budgets or people getting laid off or anything like that. It was kind of, “Okay, we’re going to have less people. But we need those who are still here to pick up the slack and do more and cover everyone else’s bases.”

It kind of made me feel like they were saying, “Do what you can with what you have. Once that runs out, you’re just going to have to find another way.” It just kind of made me feel like we had to scrap and scrounge to find anything to keep going with what you were trying to do. It’s almost like they wanted us to do more with less. That was the phrase that I had heard quite a few times, as far as when they started cutting budgets, was to do more with less. In some cases, it was fine and it was easy. In other cases, it just wasn’t going to work out with what we wanted to do.

For Krissy, the scrap and scrounge focus was seen in the organization’s strategy for staffing her department, which focused on having ever-lower wage earning, less technically-skilled staff from other departments fill in as needed, rather than filling the need with a single, qualified person:

The lady that came from the mailroom to help us out, we were trying to get her to move into our department. Well, she was with us for three or four months and when the busy season was over, we figured, “Okay, now they’ve seen what

you've done, so now we'll be able to get you onto our department and you can probably get a pay raise." Well, they never would do that.

Then when they got rid of my coworker [supervisor] and replaced her with somebody that was getting paid probably a good six / seven dollars an hour less than her. I was there for three years, why would you not put me in the supervisor position of the department, instead of giving it to this person who doesn't even know what they are doing? And once I left, I told the other lady that had helped us, I was like, "Okay, well, they've gotten rid of me now, so there's no reason for them not to give you a raise" —and they have yet to ever get her a raise. She's only making like 10.50 an hour. That's almost nine dollars less than I was making an hour.

CONCLUSION

This chapter highlights the multiple forms of work embedded in existing and changing workplace policies, processes and structures. This additional work requires time, effort and emotional labor (Mumby & Putnam, 1992) beyond that required to complete the technical duties of one's formal job. The breadth and depth of these overlapping factors, represents a stress on both individuals and the organizations in which they operate. The next chapter will define and explore an updated model of the organizational exit process based on the findings of this study.

Chapter 10: A New Understanding of Organizational Exit

Constant changes in organizational structures are causing new pressures and stresses for organizational members, particularly for newcomers to the paid workforce. Compounding the effects of these pressures—as participant narratives illustrated—is the fact that organizational members are often not experiencing just a single workplace change or challenge at a time, they are often dealing with several of these issues simultaneously. As a result, consideration of exit can begin very early in one’s organizational tenure. The following diagram summarizes the findings related to the ongoing exit dynamics as detailed in previous sections.

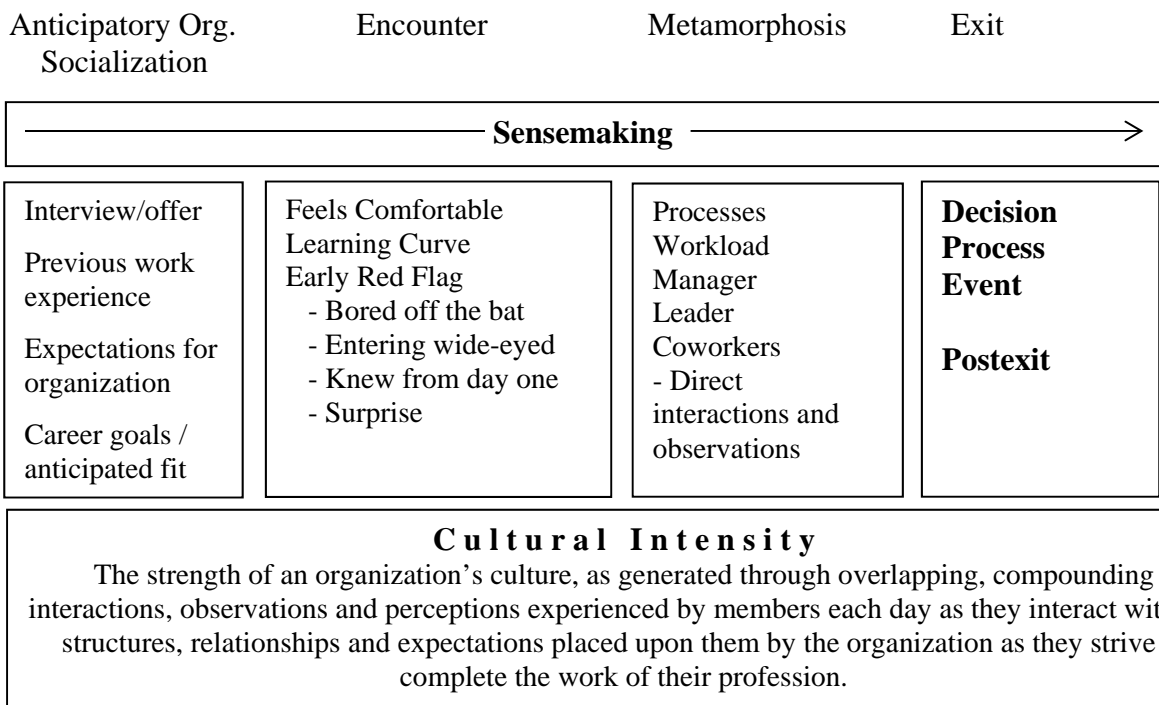


Figure 1: Exit Dynamics Throughout the Phases Jablin’s (1987) Assimilation Model

Today’s flat, increasingly under-resourced organizations are characterized by high rates of change, as core work functions become devalued in favor of “innovation” and a

drive to increase efficiency and profitability. As revealed by participants' narratives, organizational members, particularly newcomers, can face multiple socialization challenges very soon after joining an organization—and this stress and uncertainty can continue throughout one's tenure, stimulating exit-related sensemaking at even the earliest stages of socialization. However, before reaching the point of making an *exit decision*, newer members also continue sensemaking about their current circumstances by drawing on previous job experiences, recent anticipatory organizational socialization experiences, and memorable messages received about the organization or their own career goals.

Thus, the exit process is rooted in sensemaking and is highly communicative. During anticipatory organizational socialization, potential members seek out information about the organization from online and personal contacts, as well as receive messages from organizational members involved in the hiring and onboarding process that serve as an indication of the organization's values, culture and work. Newcomers also compare this new potential employer to their last job, or what they expect of a particular industry or organization (for example, a family-owned restaurant or a company in the finance industry). In the current era of relatively frequent job changes, potential newcomers are also actively assessing the degree to which they will have the opportunity to attain skills and experiences that will benefit them over their career, as whether the organization will allow them to as exert a level of influence appropriate for their level of education and/or job title.

These sensemaking comparisons continue during the encounter phase, as individuals attempted to verify the “sense” of the organization they felt they gained during the anticipatory organizational socialization phase. When this initial assessment matched up with their experience in the encounter phase, participants spoke of “feeling

comfortable” with the organization and its culture. However, those who received messages in the encounter phase—either directly from either individual members, or indirectly through observation of organizational practices—that contradicted their earlier anticipatory socialization messages spoke of having to get up to speed on the actual organizational culture and/or work practices in order to attain acceptance and membership—an experience referred to as a “learning curve” by several participants.

Still other participants, confronted with inconsistencies between their initial expectations and their early experiences inside the organization, spoke of questioning the degree to which the organization and its members actually met the expectations they had coming into the organization. Some new members referred to recognizing the need to reset their initial “wide-eyed” expectations, although others spoke of recognizing early—even from “day one” —that the organization was not a good fit with their initial expectations or what they wanted from a job. Experiences such as working extremely long work hours, being expected to work through lunch or other breaks, receiving abusive communication from a manager or leader, and/or realizing that other members—particularly one’s manager or leader— are not who they appeared to be in the interview process, are a few of the exchanges and related sensemaking realizations that resulted in early considerations of exit.

As these precursors of exit indicate, even the earliest stages of socialization are not always positive, and can actually be quite negative—serving as a filter for every other organizational interaction. As a result, newer members may potentially begin considering exit very early after joining the organization—exerting an early form of personalization of their socialization experience. In this regard, it is important to note that this is not typically a matter of perception – a vast number of participants shared stories of incidents that were objectively negative, or even abusive, including those noted above.

Additionally, one's experiences can become even more negative as they move into what should be the metamorphosis stage of socialization. However, as a result of these initial, often repeated, negative communicative exchanges, metamorphosis can be a time when one's outsider status becomes solidified by both other members and by the individual, through acts of personalization. For example, John's teammates regularly isolated him from socially and excluded from on-the-job training opportunities. In contrast—Rita, at first shocked by her peers' lack of professionalism and examples of her boss' managerial incompetence, actually took pride in being different than her colleagues and seeing herself as an outsider. She began to plan her exit after only a couple of months on the job.

Overall, the exit phase of socialization is a highly communicative process which involves sending and receiving messages that can be quite surprising and negative for members potentially already considering voluntary exit. The formal exit stage is often also a continuation of earlier communicative exchanges that set the member on a path to choosing exit. Additionally, during exit the organization and fellow members often offer little validation of the exiting member's contribution to the organization, directly dismiss or question the exiter's reasons for leaving, and even avoid interacting with the exiter prior to their departure. These negative—and often very unexpected exit phase experiences—provide a final, negative ending to a member's experience.

To update and expand the existing conceptualization of the organizational exit process, the following section begins by summarizing findings associated with each research question, then detailing the findings within the context of Jablin's (1987) Model of Assimilation¹. The section concludes by defining and then detailing, through

¹ As noted earlier in this document, the overarching process of joining, participating in and leaving organizations is referred to as *socialization* in both the current literature and for the purposes of this study; the term *assimilation* is currently used to refer to an organization's attempts to shape a member to its needs and goals (Kramer, 2010; Berkelaar, 2013).

participant narratives, an updated model of organizational exit focused on individuals' efforts to make sense of, respond to, and process an organization's reaction to their 1) Exit Decision, 2) Exit Process, 3) Exit Event, and 4) Postexit.

FINDINGS BY RESEARCH QUESTION

RQ 1: What organizational actions or events contribute to sensemaking related to organizational exit?

Insufficient Onboarding Processes and Related Newcomer Surprises

The job exiters interviewed in this study, particularly young workers in their first full-time jobs, struggled to assimilate due to the lack of structure and insufficient formal new hire training and mentoring programs. Several participants commented about going into their latest job “wide-eyed,” only to quickly realize that the organization's values and priorities were much different than they had anticipated based on how things “look on paper” or “from the outside.” Although the lack of adequate onboarding is not necessarily new, what is not fully accounted for in the current literature is how a lack of these types of supporting structures combine with other cultural and structural challenges to further confuse, stress and isolate new organizational members. Chloe explains how, despite her excitement about her new job, she struggled to understand the actual scope of her job duties:

I was very excited because it was my first full-time job ever. I was more like bright-eyed and bushy-tailed about that than I was about anything else....I didn't enjoy the first position that I had. But they hired me knowing that they were going to move me more into the rehab – more in athletic training and less of the techy part of it. I know that's really confusing, but that's what I didn't like about my first job is I had so many confusing things like that.

Jane had a similar mix of experiences and reactions when she first started her waitress job:

When it started off, I liked it. The culture was very different because the owners were actually all from Iran and the majority of the workers all were from Mexico and didn't speak much English, so it was interesting culture shock having to learn another language to work with whoever I was with, so that was different. It was really fun at first. Eventually, I learned that the owners were very difficult to work with and kind of womanizing, but other than that, the customer side of it, being able to see different people all day and, you know, interact with them was nice.

Organization's Failure to Recognize Change as a Form of Organizational Communication

The findings of this study illustrate that change events and the processes used to implement them are meaning-laden source of sensemaking for members above and beyond any formal change communications offered by the organization. Participant narratives indicate that members view change as a reflection of organizational values and priorities. Furthermore, navigating a consistent stream of multiple, overlapping micro and macro organizational changes, as well as the resulting shifts in workplace relationships, creates a form of cultural intensity that newcomers in particular, and often more tenured members as well, are often ill-equipped to handle. The resulting feelings of isolation, stress, and/or frustration—often dramatically reinforced over time by daily experience—become a filter members use as a sensemaking device for their organizational experiences. The failure of organizations to recognize the implicit meanings communicated by the sheer number, frequency and types of change occurring across an organization over time contributes significantly to members' feelings of stress and isolation.

Failing to Deal with that "One Person"

A common theme cited in participants' narratives related to that one problematic colleague who inflicted persistent misery on them. Behaviors ranging from making daily comments about their personality or work style to the individual or their coworkers

(Kelly); to trying to sabotage their work and reputation (Jean); and the extreme of appearing to enjoy inflicting fear and intimidation across the entire organization (Emily and her leader, “the velvet hammer”). This “one person” exists across levels, with participants citing peers, managers and leaders as sources of workplace neglect and abuse. For example, in Emily’s case the new leader operated with a great level of organizational power given her role as general manager.

Failure of the Organization to be Aware of and/or Discipline Problematic Employee Behavior Implicitly Communicated Organizational Values

Although several individuals did directly address the perpetrator and/or ask supervisors or managers for assistance, in some cases that “one person” was actually the individual’s direct supervisor (Alyssa, Chloe, Darren, Jane, Jeremy, John, Melanie, and Veronica). In these highly isolating situations, the abuse and resulting feelings of isolation were especially intense. Emily thought she was having a heart attack one day while driving home from work, and Chloe began losing patches of hair due to the stress suffered at the hands of abusive managers and leaders.

The next line of defense typically suggested in many organizations, consulting with Human Resources, was not always a viable option either. In some cases Human Resources was actually part of the problem, as Mary experienced when she discovered that her boss and the Human Resources director were “best friends,” or in Darren and Chloe’s situations, where they were “blindsided” by the betrayal from the Human Resources person they thought was going to help them, but instead used their stories against them in order to protect the organization’s supervisors and managers.

Profession Not Valued or Supported

Narratives also indicate that experiencing a lack of appreciation and resource-allocated support for the work of their profession within the organization was a particular source of concern for participants. From failing to receive physically necessary breaks during a full shift as a massage therapist (Maggie), to not having resources allocated to purchase the technology needed to do one's job (Ryan), many participants reported frustration with constantly having to explain and secure the necessities of their profession. Perhaps even more important from an organizational communication perspective, participants also reported having to constantly explain and advocate for the value of their professions and their own professional expertise.

Surprise or Expectancy Violation

Surprises were generated by a multitude of factors, from having limited initial knowledge or an idealized view of the industry, profession and or company; to having one's trust in the organization, its leadership and/or management violated in a way that was unsettling and challenged what the person thought they understood about the organization. Rita had just such an experience shortly after starting as a marketing assistant at a local credit union:

The culture was very catty...I got yelled at — excuse me, let me rephrase — I got told on by three people that I wasn't wearing pantyhose. Instead of an employee coming up to me and saying, "Hey, Rita, this is a really stupid rule, but you have to be wearing pantyhose," they went to my boss. Yeah, so that's how backward and old school these people were, that you had to wear pantyhose. I mean, how ridiculous is that? I got told on, which was absolutely ridiculous and immature and unprofessional. I was shocked. Credit unions are a different breed. I thought it was going to be more of a banking financial culture.

The intensity of work demands, as well as both the implicit and explicit expectations about what it took to be a "good worker" or "team player" was also

problematic. Furthermore, in some cases, expectancy violation was the norm, occurring multiple times and across every phase of the socialization process, from anticipatory socialization to encounter and metamorphosis, often culminating in a "straw that broke the camel's back" event (in the words of several participants), which solidified participants' exit-related sensemaking and ultimate decision to leave, adding cultural intensity through heightened attention to one's sense of uncertainty and concern about what violation may be coming next. Rick's experience as an auditor illustrates this ongoing cycle of negative surprise—as he adapted to the team's codified rules about what it meant to be "a good team player," the organization violated his expectation of the reward he would receive for meeting this requirement:

I'd say it was when I was working for almost 18 hours [a day] and I got sent to San Antonio for a month. I think I woke up like at 6:00am, drove into the client at like 7:30, hadn't checked on the hotel or done anything. They had this commitment, so to speak, that every single auditing agent would post on a board or write out, "This is our commitment. We're going to leave at this time. We're going to work through lunch. Here's what your address is. Here's all this other stuff. They put a commitment on the wall about what's going to be. So, I was under the impression they were leaving at 9:00pm probably, work hard, we'll get out at 9:00. Come to find out, though, the first day that I was out there, we were out there until about 1:00 in the morning working. I mean, and I was like, and it was kind of just this unspoken thing, where you couldn't just get up and leave. It was bad, you know?

That was kind of a harsh slap of reality of what the culture was kind of like there. There's high turnover at this particular company, too. You could leave and if leaving after 14 hours makes you look bad, and I mean, it does, because you are going to get poor reviews and get kicked out of there anyways, you know? So, I guess having that realization about it, what the hours were—there's no getting out of it. That was one piece where you're kind of like, "Man, this is pretty crappy," and then in the summer they tried to institute mandatory [reduced Friday hours], like you can leave at 3:00 on Fridays no matter what.

So, they did that and three weeks later they said, "No, you can't leave. You have to work mandatory 50-hour workweeks." So, after busting — after working hard all throughout from January until mid-April, you think you're going to get a little

bit of relief or a — I mean, I guess like the 40-hour workweek for a little bit, or a 43-hour work week, they turn around and said, “No, you have to work 50 hours” because some guy up in Houston needs to get his pay out [executive bonus] on how people—people weren’t doing enough hours. It was pretty ridiculous at times.

RQ 2: What are the organizational communication dynamics that contribute to an individual’s decision to exit?

Lack of Values Alignment—“Looks Good on Paper”

Many participant comments highlighted a critical sensemaking realization that occurred over time, their realization that the organization’s focus was on making things “look good on paper,” an in vivo code stated by several participants. This sensemaking outcome, triggered by interactions and observations during their daily work—resulted in a perception that the organization was most interested in making statements and achieving numbers that would “look good on paper,” in order to uphold the status quo in terms of organizational structures, priorities and power relationships. Perceiving the organization’s focus on looking good on paper often led participants to question the degree to which the organization valued them as individuals—and if they were wasting their time in trying to do their jobs well, rather than “just getting the job done.”

Ultimately, members shared comments indicating that the organization’s focus on “looking good on paper” made them feel like an outsider because it was hard to believe that others did not see what they saw, and they also questioned their association with the organization, given managers’ and leaders’ focus on things other than the quality and impact of participants’ role-based contributions. Jacob’s experience reflects this sensemaking process:

Denver is a back office. They did the accounting, the IT – all activity that doesn’t generate investments or revenue. It’s a non-revenue office. It was perceived as more of an inconvenience than anything. You just really started to get a sense of

that more and more as you went on...I think part of it [also] was that Thomas Davidson, the founder of the company, who's involvement became less and less, let it be taken over by these guys that just don't have an understanding of it—or at least of the Denver part of it. They are making decisions based on what they see on a piece of paper rather than the real work that's being done—looking at my head count and costs of operations, that sort of thing...

It just got worse and worse and they started moving people around. It was almost like management by chaos. People would get moved around and there wasn't—you got a sense that the leadership didn't exactly really know—they would come up with plans that would take forever towards the end, and put people in different groups and try to silo functions and that sort of thing. They put it on this board—it took six months to come up with that? And then there really wasn't even a plan to execute it. It was kind of interesting. It was a weird deal. I think it came from the CFO. He'd spend all his time doing these analytics and then would worry about—should this number go at the bottom? Is this formatted correctly? You spend talking about stuff like that rather than how to make it work.

Chloe's experience highlights how the “looks good on paper” focus of an organization can trigger significant concerns for members as they question their own judgment and willingness to be personally associated with organizational decisions and outcomes:

I feel like what the organization said on paper matched my values. But what was actually happening, did not match my values. I feel like my manager valued money over patients. Because he was so budget-minded, that impacted a lot of different things in how he treated his employees. That changes behavior. ...If I were to read everything that they said, the mission statement—all that stuff, I would be, 'Yeah, right on, right on, right on.' And that's how I felt when I first started there. The deeper I got into the things, I was like, 'This isn't right.'

Just knowing that it's very hard to get fired from them bothered me. Because he [manager] would see people doing things that were obviously wrong. They obviously should be reprimanded for it. And they would get a slap on the wrist. One coworker said that she had certification [but she did not] and she was working in the field without it. She actually got a different job that paid BETTER so that she would be doing something legal again and wouldn't be working illegally. They didn't report her. They should be reporting her to the state licensing board because she said she had a license. That's who I was working for. They would say, “Oh, we strictly follow the rules” and their policy would say - but it wasn't what was actually happening. That was so conflicting. It just bothers me.

As these narrative samples illustrate, once employees perceive that the organization values appearances and profits more than people and quality outcomes, members further question and disengage from the organization's mission.

Cultural Intensity

The steady stream of organizational changes combined with abusive management/leadership and supervision through bureaucracy creates cultural intensity. *Cultural intensity* refers to strength of an organization's culture, as generated through overlapping, compounding interactions, observations and perceptions experienced by members each day as they interact with the structures, relationships and expectations placed upon them by the organization as they strive to complete the work of their profession within the current context of the organization. Cultural intensity is generated by organizational dynamics such as productivity norms, direct and indirect messages from coworkers, manager and leaders, organizational bureaucracy, and the types and frequency of organizational change—as well as the degree to which one's profession and work are perceived to be valued by the organization.

Cultural intensity, through the silent pressure exerted on members to conform with organizational norms often resulted in a focus on complying with what members perceived was required or expected of them, rather than what they were truly capable of contributing. For participants in this study, cultural intensity often resulted in feeling of difference, isolation, fear and frustration, typically as a result of informal or formal discipline that communicated their relative outsider status. Ron's experience illustrates this process, as he compared his time as a contracted chemical technician for a global technology company to his time spent serving in the U.S. military, sharing that he found

the corporate culture of the job he had recently left to be more culturally intense than that of the military:

[In the military, the feeling is] the block is checked, we're moving on. Know you're wrong. The military, you screw up, know it. You will suffer for it. You will be physically punished for it to a degree, like physical exercise. They make you do pushups until you can't feel your arms. But the thing is the Army is so significantly reluctant to put things on paper, there's a big culture switch for you. The military is so incredibly against putting things on paper because that will follow you around for the rest of your life, and they expect you to improve. So if you're a young soldier and you screw up, well, that's expected. If I write it down on paper, and you make it to a senior supervisor and you have three or four screw ups on your record, is that really going to haunt you for the rest of your life?

Whereas in OE corporate culture they want everything documented. They have to know every time you screwed up. I'm like, okay, so you're basically haunting somebody with this. That's not effective management. It comes off very oppressive and kind of shitty. I don't really have a better acronym for that. There's no way to put that in sort of key corporate speak. It's incredibly derogatory and debasing to have somebody sit there and lecture you. I didn't even make this mistake. You're right, it's my responsibility to follow up for my partner. I respect and understand and I'll do that, but you've literally been hammering me for 15 minutes about a piece of paper that I'm literally telling you, "That's my signature." I have signed all of my parts. Why is this going to reflect poorly on me? At the time I really needed the money, so that's a really dangerous perspective for me, and now I'm afraid.

Fear of Speaking Up / Isolation

Feelings of disempowerment and isolation were formed by many factors, most notably when members experienced surprise related to a lack of values alignment between what they initially understood the organization's values to be and what the organization—typically through its managers and leaders—reveals are its actual values in practice. This isolation, in turn, contributes to and reinforces a fear of speaking up, perpetuating cultural intensity and further silencing dissent, thereby reinforcing deference to unspoken organizational norms. Alisa, a second and third grade teacher for a Title 1 school in a large urban area summed up this sensemaking process:

The population that I was working with, a large number of Hispanic and African-American and poor — I felt like that's a similar background to where I come from. I didn't grow up in this city. I grew up in a small town, and so what I would think is if I lived here at their age, this is the kind of school that I would go to. The kind of education they were getting, I did not feel was the best education that we could have given them, but it was very impossible for me, for any individual person within that big organization to—especially at the level I was at as a teacher—to change that. I have to do what the main office tells me to do, even if I don't believe that it is beneficial to the student learning process or their self-esteem.

In contrast, in many cases, individuals did speak up, but their concerns were dismissed, cementing their sense of isolation—and frustration. These individuals were left feeling that managers, leaders and the organization as a whole did not value their organization-specific insights or the role their profession played in ensuring the quality of the organization's daily operations. Maggie's experience in speaking up to the owner of the spa where she worked about the operational incompetence of the spa's manager highlights these issues:

I actually spoke with her [spa owner] on a visit to the business. There is a coffee shop in the strip mall that the business is in and her and I actually went down for coffee and we spoke in length for an hour and a half regarding the issues. Her view on it was, "Well, if you haven't gone to her [spa manager] with the problem, I'm not going to do anything about it." And it's not that I didn't go to the manager regarding issues, but she wasn't making any changes. The owner just kept saying, "Well, we need to give her a chance, we need to give her a chance." But they're expecting us to talk these clients into signing up for their [monthly massage] membership when we're having a problem even having enough oil to make it through the day.

At some point, there needs to be an intervention into a business that has just opened. You would think they [spa owners] should be more concerned about how their business is going to operate the first year, but they didn't seem like it was too important. They would come down and throw a party at the spa. They weren't concerned with how it was running; they were just concerned with getting it open and getting customers. I don't think they put importance on what needed importance.

Abusive and/or Absent Leader or Manager

Many participants spoke of abusive behavior by leaders and managers. This issue was particularly prevalent, and severe, among participants working for small businesses and those in public education. Examples of abusive behavior were captured in codes including Being Accused, Being Blindsided, and Being Undermined. Specific abusive leadership and management behaviors included personal ridicule, public shaming of self or coworkers, disrupting coworker relationships, and surprise disciplinary meetings with Human Resources.

Alyssa's abusive manager, a tenured leader in the firm, badmouthed and then attacked one of her teammates via an email on which Alyssa was copied, embarrassing him and causing temporary rupture to Alyssa's relationship with him:

I worked with this guy name Todd. Todd was a big teddy bear. He's 6'2" and 320 pounds and he just has a heart of gold and he means well. He's a remote employee working out of Florida. He comes in and I introduced myself to him. I was going to be working pretty closely with him on a number of projects. I wanted to make it work out really well. But my boss was so aggressive. She was aggressive. She just—in hindsight, I knew better than to listen to her, but I did because she was my boss and I wanted to please her. She had always talked about, "Oh my gosh. I made Todd cry. I made him cry several times. One time--" bragging about how she did this. She was almost like sport in beating a guy down.

Alyssa's experience also speaks to how multiple sources and/or incidents of abuse can amplify cultural intensity, as this was just one of several problematic, even traumatic, events she experienced during her tenure. Alyssa later commented that one specific exchange between her boss and Todd was the "turning" point when she realized she needed to exit the organization because tolerance for such abuse indicated to her that "they like having those kinds of people there because they keep them around. They're the only kind of people who stay there." The abusive leadership behaviors highlighted in

Alyssa's experiences were a special point of exit-related sensemaking for many participants.

Absent managers also caused concern for participants. Alexis explained how her goal was to do a good enough job that her manager would remain absent, since the only time she appeared was when things were going wrong—resulting in her boss' rare attempts at recognition to appear inauthentic:

She was a bit of a bull in a china cabinet and didn't really interact with us all that much, and only got into the weeds with certain things if she thought that we weren't managing them well. So your goal was to manage things really, really well and have a lot of success so she'd stay out of your hair. Because you didn't really want her messing in your business. She didn't take it to an interpersonal level to have a conversation – not about the work that was being done, but about you as an individual. Like, "Hey, how you holding up? Hey, we just went through this big initiative. This has caused a lot of change on our part, and I know everybody is working really hard." She did those very volleyball-ish kind of responses. Like, "Thanks everybody, you've done a great job." Like, "Well, thanks. I'm taking that to heart. That really feels great. Warm and fuzzy here now." But she didn't pull us aside and say, "Hey, I just want to personally say thank you for all the work that you've done."

Being Made to Feel Replaceable

Participants from executive leadership to factory floor commented that they felt "replaceable." This replaceability was communicated in many ways, ranging from lack of communication from managers and leaders, to failing to receive a performance review (therefore not creating documentation or setting expectation for the possibility of promotion), to intense workloads, and specific comments from managers and leaders. Joe, a sales assistant for a small father-son business, perceived his replaceability based on how he saw his coworkers on the operations team treated by company leadership:

I started to see that it really was more, me seeing them, more about the money, just bringing in that money and not caring really about their employees at all, even if it meant—if they'd lose an operations person, that's okay, we'll just hire

somebody else and train them. It doesn't really matter. They're not that important. Almost that the employees were pretty much replaceable. That's kind of what it felt like after being there for a little over a year.

Chris shared a similar sentiment based on experiences from early in his tenure with a large global technology company:

The way the department was set up, I understand the rationale behind it, but I will say you do feel a little bit more like a cog in the wheel, like a replaceable part, because they make people in charge of a part of the overall software. That's somewhat related to the process, I will say, not completely. Being part of that larger organization and getting that small piece of the puzzle or small piece of the wheel or whatever you want to call it to work on, it's not quite as motivating to know that you just fit in with a real small part of the puzzle, and you feel that you're fairly replaceable.

RQ 3: What structural factors support or impede an employee's sense of communicative agency?

Absent or Abusive Human Resources Department

Although participants in this study assumed that Human Resources was a resource for employees, participants' experiences revealed that the role of Human Resources is also often to protect the organization from employees. Several participants described going to Human Resources for assistance in navigating difficult relationships with their supervisors or managers, with the hope that they would receive support and direct action in correcting problematic, unethical and even illegal activities in which their managers were complicit. However, participants reported surprise at discovering in these situations that Human Resources was not an advocate for them, but rather was focused on protecting existing organizational power structures.

As detailed in previous sections, Chloe and Darren had perhaps the most intense experiences with Human Resources. Both were betrayed by Human Resources representatives, ambushed in surprise meetings attended by the Human Resources staff

member with whom they had shared their stories, and who had in turn shared at least part of their stories with the supervisor or manager in question—the very manager who was also in attendance at the surprise meetings. Chloe and Darren both reported feeling shocked, hurt, and angered by this treatment, particularly because it came from an individual—and a department—they felt they could trust to help them.

The other issue that existed with Human Resources was an absence of the Human Resources function all together. This problem was particularly prevalent in small and family-owned businesses. In these smaller organizations and flatter structures there is literally nowhere for employees with grievances or concerns to go for assistance. Participant narratives reveal that this lack of organizational support is a risk for organizations as it leaves employees no path for reporting organizational issues that also generate personal risk for them and other members related to issues including illegal business dealings, sexual harassment, and other forms of discrimination.

For example, Joe, who worked for a father-son business, observed the problematic treatment of a female coworker and friend who got pregnant as the result of an affair with the company's owner. Company leaders then took effort to isolate the woman both socially and professionally within the business. Although she chose (under duress) to quit the organization and leave the state prior to having the baby, the owner's treatment of her left the company open to legal repercussions, and communicated a clear message to the remaining employees about the organization's values and power dynamics. With no Human Resources function to which he could report his concerns (and share selected insights his coworker had shared with him about the situation), the unfolding drama witnessed by coworkers sent a clear cultural message regarding leadership's power and that even the most problematic leadership behavior would go unpunished.

Organizational Structures that Amplify Hierarchical Power and Disable Employee Voice

The broad nature of work arrangements covered in this study, including members ranging from C-level executives and factory workers, to new hires fresh out of college and workers with over a decade worth of tenure in an organization (and even more years of total full-time paid work experience). Additionally, full-time, part-time and temporary agency workers are also represented, helping to reveal the complex challenges organizational members can face in attempting to express voice based on their role and level in the organization. This challenge is particularly acute for new employees, virtual employees, third-party contracted employees, and those working in small family owned businesses. Each of these work arrangements communicates an outsider status which is amplified by the lack of clear processes, resources, and structure for these more at risk forms of membership to voice their concerns.

Sally, a 65-year old former purchasing manager who lost her \$80,000 a year job at the height of the recession and had worked a string of low-wage customer service and contracted secretarial jobs since then (including the job she discussed here) summarized the often hidden economic motivation hiring low-wage workers:

It was common conversation among the people that felt free to talk to me about it that the person that interviewed me [on-site temporary agency manager] was very well paid and everybody else made not much because he gets his pay by keeping everybody else's pay lower. And so it behooves him not to be handing out raises. If he can keep his "costs" down, he can keep his pay up, but have tremendous turnover in those jobs. It doesn't really impact him, as long as the client isn't complaining because of the turnover and the people that don't know, aren't well trained because they're continually in learning mode... There just aren't that many good jobs that utilize people's skills and experience these days. You're kind of trained to fit into a spot more than being able to find something that really suits you.

These dynamics are particularly troubling given that these “distant,” excluded and less powerful members are often most at risk for troublesome treatment. Third-party contractors are typically not protected by the structures, policies, and procedures that help protect full-time employees. Although this finding regarding issues with contingent labor and employee voice are not new (Gossett, 2006), when taken into consideration along with other factors contributing to cultural intensity—including the lack of employee focused Human Resources functions, abusive leadership, and a lack of cultural reward for expressing dissent—the current prevalence of contingent labor arrangements puts these not-quite-members at considerable risk for neglect and abuse.

In addition, societal level rhetoric devaluing blue-collar and public sector workers appears to be manifesting problematic workplace dynamics for those workers. Public school teachers Melanie (working for a small rural school district in Wyoming) and Alisa (serving in a large urban district in Texas) reported working for school principals and leaders that repeatedly verbally attacked them and questioned their competence—in both cases, in front of classrooms of students, as well as in front of peers. Both teachers chose to leave the teaching profession as a result of this intense, ongoing abuse from leaders and lack of support from their organizations.

Gendered Treatment – Privileging the Masculine

Women face particularly challenging situations in trying to voice concern. Findings of this study reveal that this was a result of intersection of gendered work and gendered expectations of women in all workplace roles. Because of these overlapping factors, several women reported being told that the male behavior that was the source of their concerns was dismissed as simply normal, unintentional, or simply humorous behavior. As a newly promoted restaurant manager, Jane’s concerns about the sexual

harassment she and other waitresses were experiencing from male kitchen staff were dismissed as normal and humorous:

The first time I told them I felt uncomfortable with the employees and what they were saying and the disregard [for my authority], his response was like, “Oh, haha, it’s normal,” kind of thing, which made me realize these really are men that just don’t care at all about what’s going on to any of these employees. They would have rather just replace me than have to deal with anything or fix it.

Ivy experienced similar treatment as a senior manager at a top management consulting firm. In her case, explicit sexual harassment from two sources among 20 of her direct reports, male India team members brought to the US for this project who reported to Ivy, and from her peer, a male senior manager from Columbia. The tight physical space assigned for the team by the client only exacerbated the sexual harassment Ivy faced:

The dynamic on the team was terrible because it was a bunch of dudes who were technical, but didn’t have people skills, and so didn’t know how to deal with a woman on team. That was painful because I was like, “Guys, come on. Can we not be so chauvinistic Indian men all in the same giant cubicle with me.” Did [also] get outwardly sexually harassed by the other senior manager who was Colombian, also a chauvinist.

I was like, “No. I’m done. I can’t fucking do this anymore.” I’m like, I don’t want to be a Partner because I’m going to have to deal with more and more of this and have to tell them what’s right and wrong. It was just one of those moments that you’re like—this is not a good situation for a woman to be in. And I’m tough. I’m real tough. I can do this. But I had had enough at that point. I’m so sick of showing up here every week and dealing with you assholes, that honestly, my life is too short.

I tried things to change it. I called them out on their bad behavior. Got real loud and rowdy at a point. I was like, “You guys are being assholes. I’m just going to stop us right now because you guys just don’t know and I’m going to tell you.” I felt very sort of deflated after that.

She continued, highlighting how acceptance of this type of behavior starts at the highest levels of the firm and that this realization signaled the end of her goal, after more than ten years with the firm, of making Partner herself:

It was like, “I can’t.” This is not cool. Every time I sort of interacted with partners who were dudes, I just got a bad taste in my mouth, it started being sort of repetitive. Like, “Ha, ha.” It was just like technology partners being chauvinistic. Every time I’d say something, they’re like, “Oh, don’t be sensitive.” I’m like, “Is there seriously how things—it’s 2010 and this is happening. Really, guys? I don’t mean to be a downer on your party, but fuck you!” It was one of those like I can’t—this is not a friendly place for women.

Constant Organizational Change and the Compounding Effects of Change

As noted previously, and often driven by the desire to make operations “look good on paper,” participants revealed a consistently high level of organizational change—from high level changes with cascading effects, such as new leadership, merger/acquisition, or change in business strategy—to more micro-level changes such as coworker promotions, process changes and new technology implementations. Some changes were gradual—and some, like the death of a beloved leader, were more sudden, which was even more jarring when it occurred in the context of other ongoing organizational changes. In addition to organization-wide changes, participants experienced changes that impacted them individually, such as being transferred to a new team or receiving a new manager.

Based on participant narratives, the compounding effect of navigating all of these forms of change simultaneously cannot be underestimated. Chase’s early experience in his role as a new Human Resources process consultant underscores sensemaking challenges generated by constant organizational change and uncertainty:

It was mainly my first client team that I was on. They had lost two analysts prior to me being hired. So they were stretched very thin, and a lot of the process document stuff they had and their trainings were just, everything was everywhere.

There was no proper way to store anything. You just had to dig and dig and dig through files if you wanted to find something. If anything had quote unquote caught on fire and they needed to immediately switch from one thing to focusing on whatever the problem was—it was just chaos all the time.

There was never really a procedure to follow and no one ever really—because I was only on that client for about a month, I guess, no one really taught me how to do any process. Most of the time I just kind of observed people doing whatever they did day to day. It was never the same, and there was nothing documented. That’s what I meant by “there was no organization.”

This “chaos all the time” also disrupts and elongates the socialization process, especially for those new to the organization or recent college graduates new to the workplace. Finally, it should be noted that particularly for the time period of voluntary exit studied here—those occurring between 2010 and 2014, (relatively soon after the 2008 U.S. recession)—people were also dealing with change and stress in their personal lives, such as having a spouse or partner who was dealing with equally stressful or uncertain work environment.

For example, participants Chloe and Ryan were a young married couple in their 20s, both simultaneously navigating stressful, uncertain work situations—and low-wage, entry level jobs. They were also new parents of an infant needing expensive ear surgery, and Chloe herself needed an additional surgery after the birth of their baby. The compounding effects of two uncertain jobs, a new baby, the worry associated with surgical procedures, and the medical bills to follow, did not end once they left home. Instead, this stress and uncertainty was layered on top of their work-related stress. Although this couple was able to successfully navigate this tumultuous time, both landing more secure jobs in the end, their case illustrates just how intense the compounding effects of change can be for some organizational members, particularly during times of larger societal-level economic turbulence.

Lack of Support, Using Bureaucracy and Rankism as Management

Participants reported experiencing a mix of incompetent management, absent leadership, and in several instances, abuse from both their manager and company leaders. In addition to handling the stress of the treatment they were receiving, participants were also sensemaking about what the presence of these types of individuals in management and leadership positions indicated about the organization's values, and as a result, the value the organization placed on their own work. From being expected to sacrifice their own personal time for work, to realizing management could not be trusted to do what was in the best interest of workers or the organization, participants' observations and experiences with management contributed significantly to exit decisions.

Rachel thought she had established an open, supportive relationship with her manager, only to learn that he thought of her as someone who should be able to figure things out on her own, rather than require his time:

We would sit in the conference room and go over some of my forecasting, but I'm not sure if that was additional [special support], or if every manager did that. I remember saying, "I need more direction, more help in that area." And I remember he had stuff going on with his ex-wife, and he had an autistic son and he had a girlfriend. He always seemed kind of preoccupied, and he did say, "Well, this is why we hired you. You should just know." You know, like "You should just do your job."

I was kind of taken aback by that. I felt like he was kind of — because we had a good discussion about, "Hey, I need help" and it was, "Okay." And then he comes back and says, "Wait a second, actually, this is what I think." And I'm like, "Oh." You know, you say that stuff to me and then you have personal stuff that's going on, that's what I thought.

These types of interactions and observations generate a feeling of working in quicksand, never being certain quite where you stand (especially for recent college graduates like Rachel who have limited framework for workplace sensemaking), amplifying hierarchical distance (Fuller, 2004) and cultural intensity, and leading to

feelings of isolation and fear of speaking up in the future. These issues are experienced at the highest levels of the organization as well, and by those who continue to speak up, pointing to the powerful role of organizational culture in enforcing silence. Jeremy asked his new leader to discuss issues with him, rather than giving direction to Jeremy's team himself:

He threatened to fire me once because I asked him to respect the chain of command. He was going right to my people and also asking my people to go right to him, with all issues and challenges. And when he was going to my people, he wasn't filling me in on conversations they were having. So it made it really, really hard for me to be a leader and to manage people when I'm saying, doing or not getting the full side of the picture—and when he's saying, giving direction, differently than I would do.

RQ 4: How do employees' narratives about their organizational exit experiences reflect their sense of agency (or perceived lack thereof) on the job?

Connecting Work Experiences Past, Present, Future Within Jobs and Across Careers

As the tour of duty metaphor of careers illustrates (Hoffman, 2013), workers in today's paid workforce reach across boundaries of time and place, using previous work experiences to make sense of what is happening within their current position. For example, when first joining, a new job and organization is compared to one or more previous jobs in terms of anticipatory socialization experiences, broader organizational culture dynamics, and communication patterns with leaders, managers and coworkers. Additionally, today's workers come into the workplace with thoughts of how this job will fit into their longer-term careers, even discussing with cohort peers only weeks into a job how they will explain this job to future employers, as recent college graduate Chase explained.

As employees gain tenure, they begin to draw more on experiences within their current job, and also compare this experience to a potential future job and longer-term career and quality of life concerns. Paul, an auditor with several decades of experience in the profession, summarized this longer-term sensemaking process:

It just made it frustrating. I recognized early on that I think I wasn't going to be long for the position, but I also didn't want to just go back into another loan review function because I got tired of that, so I think I procrastinated to a great degree, just trying to find the right type of position and obviously the job market was, at that time, difficult, so I had to be patient from that perspective.

Sales manager Mary engaged in a more “mid-range” sensemaking focused on the totality of her experience with her current employer. As a top sales person in her organization for several years running, even after the company switched industries from casino gaming to the medical industry, Mary realized that the organization and its leadership would never value her productivity or provide the type of organizational and leadership support that would relieve the stress and sacrifice required to meet the ever-increasing sales and administrative demands placed upon her, both of which increased even more after the appointment of a problematic new leader:

I would say I felt like that for a long time in the company, and again, more of it had to do with my age, so I struggled with that a lot. I felt like there are so many people out there that would admire my talents and my hard work and ethics, especially for someone my age at that time. You know, being so motivated and a hardworking person, but I think a lot of it really hit in 2000, and — it started in 2007 when they started making a big issue about the commissions. I had to start fighting about that, and that went for about a year, a year and a half. Then in 2008, when I started to transition from gaming to medical, I was kind of doing both there for a little while, transitioning one to the other. And then the medical side, it was just pretty much nothing but frustration for me.

Putting Work in Perspective

Themes within participant narratives about exit decisions and processes indicated a desire for more autonomy, balance and stability in both their professional and personal

lives. The death of her father, and being aware of her children's watchful eyes, made Rebecca realize that she wanted to make a change, one that would allow her to invest her time in proportion to what mattered most to her:

I wanted more time to – well, so my father passed away a few years ago who I was very, very close to. And even before that, though, I started to age and realize my life is finite. Thinking about the percentages of my time based on what I wanted to get out of my life in this finite time that I have in it, I realized that I was working 60 hours a week on things that I didn't really care that much about. I mean, I cared about them. I liked the way it made me feel when something was successful. But that too was not – like I don't want to just be soaked up in my ego my whole life. I want to have a life that I'm proud of and I also want to grow my children in a way that they can contribute. And so I'm very cognizant that the most important thing in my child's life is me as a role model. I don't want them to see me tied to a computer all day long and think that that's the most important thing in the world—because it's not.

Andie, the chief marketing for a health food company, was frustrated by her CEO's absence during critical merger discussions and worried that her own intense efforts would not be able to close the deal. She reflected that ultimately her main concern was fulfilling her basic personal needs and responsibilities, which she forecasted she could do in a job that did not come with the additional stress of her current situation:

I was willing to—I thought, 'Of all things I can do, I can go to a Starbucks and be a barista and I'll be the best damn barista that Starbucks has ever seen.' I mean, I would go and be a Wal-Mart greeter. There are many individuals who leave their jobs, but they're not willing to take on another job that's outside of their current career or their expertise. I would do anything. I would do anything just to ensure that there was money coming in to pay the light bill, to pay the car note, to do those things. It wasn't above me or below me. Can do any job in order to give back to society, number one. And ensure that I was taking care of responsibilities.

Exit as Voice

After experiencing multiple forms of professional neglect and personal abuse, individuals often highlighted choosing exit as the ultimate form of voice (Bashshur & Oc, 2014; Hirschman, 1970; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006). Ivy, a senior manager initially focused

on making Partner within the premier global management consultant firm where she built her career for over 10 years, chose exit after realizing that on top of the demanding financial and client management performance expectations required to make partner, she would also be required to sacrifice part of herself, continuing to fight the gender-based battles that plagued her tenure as a top-ranked consultant, as the narrative below illustrates:

The next team and [Human] Capital group that I joined had almost entirely women partners. I think that was the reason [to consider exit]. Not that I thought of any of them as good role models for who I wanted to be, but it was a real clear indicator. Like, at least this is a safer environment than the rest of the firm, in many places. I just got to that point where they're telling me to suck it up and I was like, "You know what? This is bullshit. This is not a friendly place for women." Unless you were handpicked, you're not going to succeed as a woman here.

And that was real—that was one of those moments where I was like, "Fuck you, BigTime Consulting. Fuck you." It was a downer. They talked a good game, but they still only have 10% of partners that are women. That's fucking retarded. It's just – I can't work for a place like that. I think I can change it. I get in environments that are so horribly bad. I'm like, "No, I can't." I'm not going to put up with that because my life is too short. I've got other shit to do. I'm not going to be the martyr—I'm not going to be Rosa Parks in this [situation]. It's going to be a lot of pain. And the return is not going to be there. Millions of dollars are nice, but my sanity is nicer. I had that real great 'aha' moment.

Mabel's experience at a much lower level position, included manipulation and extreme sacrifice, producing sensemaking similar to Ivy's:

That was a huge turning point because they always talked about how you treat the people you work with like family and that we are a family and that we all support each other and we all take care of each other and we're always there for each other. I felt my position was high enough to look at that [from the perspective of], "Oh, we don't want to lose her, what can we do not to lose her?" Working two positions [like I did] – for other positions in the district, if a teacher was working her teaching job, but then did tutorials on the side after school, they paid her extra. And tutorials didn't last more than 4:15. I was working two full-time jobs. I never got supplement pay. I never got extra hours because I worked another job.

It was just kind of thrown at me and the district thought, “Oh, look, we’re saving 30,000 – 35,000 dollars on not hiring another secretary, Mabel’s just going to do it, so we’ll treat it like that.” I just kind of felt like I asked for a raise, I don’t ask for anything ever and, I never abused the system. I felt like, at that time, that’s not fair. Where are we treating me family like family? Where are we taking care of each other? And so, at that moment, when I asked for that raise in August, that’s when I kind of felt like I was kind of used. I felt like I was very replaceable and that was the first time ever since I worked for them that I felt like I was replaceable.

To further expand our understanding of current organizational exit dynamics, the next section will offer an updated model of the exit process based on incremental exit steps initiated by both the exiting individual and the organization, shaping one’s exit experience and solidifying their assessment of the organization and their experience as an organizational member. This updated organizational exit model has four phases: Exit Decision, Exit Process, Exit Event and Postexit.

THE EVOLUTION OF EXIT MODEL

The exit process most commonly referenced in organizational communication literature (Jablin, 1987, 2001) consists of three phases: preannouncement; announcement and actual exit; and postexit. Although this conceptualization of the exit process focuses primarily on the discrete exit event and direct messages exchanged around that exit event, the updated process proposed based on the findings of this study traces the exit process back to the very earliest days of one’s association with an organization. In doing so, this updated model shifts the focus from the exit event-specific exchanges between an exiting member, and other members and the organization that occur immediately before, during and after an exit announcement (Klatzke, 2008; Klotz, 2013), to a longer-term perspective on exit focused on identifying the ways various organizational communication factors contribute to exit. This updated process more fully accounts for the exit-related sensemaking generated over time by a member’s observations and direct

experiences with the organization's culture, beginning with their anticipatory socialization experiences and continuing through the encounter, metamorphosis, and exit stage. More specifically, this longer-term focus illuminates the events, interactions and realizations that serve to disrupt socialization and place a member on the path to exit.

As this updated model of exit details, overall, the exit phase is a highly communicative process in and of itself—and is one that transpires over the full socialization process, with members making considerable effort to understand and resolve concerns and frustrations before finally deciding that moving out of the organization is their best choice. Exit-related sensemaking and communication about exit, both within and outside the walls of the organization, underscore that exit is a highly personalized phase of the socialization process. Individuals planning exit begin focusing on ending their membership and envisioning the freedom of a new beginning. This personalization is in part based on individual choice, as the beginnings of deidentification (Ashforth, 2001) mean that one's desire to follow organizational rules has loosened. However, personalization is based on necessity when the organization's exit process is relatively undefined, or one's manager is unfamiliar with the process used for formally processing exiting individuals. During exit, members are often forced to deal with yet more ambiguity and to exert the effort to personalize, and even create their own, exit process. Rather than offering organizational support to members during exit, this is yet another example of the “extra effort” organizations require of their members.

Finally, it is important to note that one stage of exit is *much* less communicative than others—that is the postexit phase. In fact, several participants commented at the end of their interviews that they felt that they had just been through “therapy” as this was the first time communicating with someone else about what leaving the organization meant to them and for them. In postexit, now former members engage in heightened

sensemaking, individually reflecting on the entirety of their organizational experience and attempting to redefine their professional identities (by returning to school for a career change, returning to a previous employer, or starting over in a new job and/or industry). In postexit, exiters also reflect on what they need and expect from their next job, and/or reflect think consciously about the role of work and career in their lives. Like the previous phases of the final stage of exit, postexit is also highly personalized, as the former member has to work through thoughts, emotions and, in some cases, high levels of ambiguity regarding their next steps related to job and career.

Whether the exit phase is “driven” by the organization or the exiting individual, leaving an organization is the final outcome of continual loops of sensemaking occurring throughout a member's organizational tenure, rather than simply a discrete event that always transpires in a rapid, linear progression. Although some participants in the current study did indeed decide to exit and took action to do so within a matter of days or weeks, the majority of participants described a process that reached back into earlier days of their tenure, with some reporting that their exit-related sensemaking began during the anticipatory socialization process, as a result of how the organization handled the interview process and pre-entry communication/coordination leading up to their first day on the job.

Extrapolating this much longer process contributes to organizational communication literature by expanding the study of the exit process beyond the messages sent by an exiting individual. Findings explore a much broader focus on the messages that the organization sends implicitly or explicitly to the individual over time—reaching far back into the socialization process—that contribute to exit related sensemaking and plans to communicate and implement an exit decision. The model represented here also expands our understanding of the postexit process by, again, spending more time

analyzing sensemaking related to not only exiters' experiences within the organization they just left, but also how that experience influences their future professional and personal plans. For example, participants' postexit sensemaking revealed that their most recent on-the-job experiences played a significant role in shaping their anticipatory expectations related to their next jobs and organization, as well as their longer-term careers. This section details the specific insights gained about this more holistic, longer-term view of the exit process, revealing a new four stage exit process including: exit decision, exit process, exit event, and postexit.

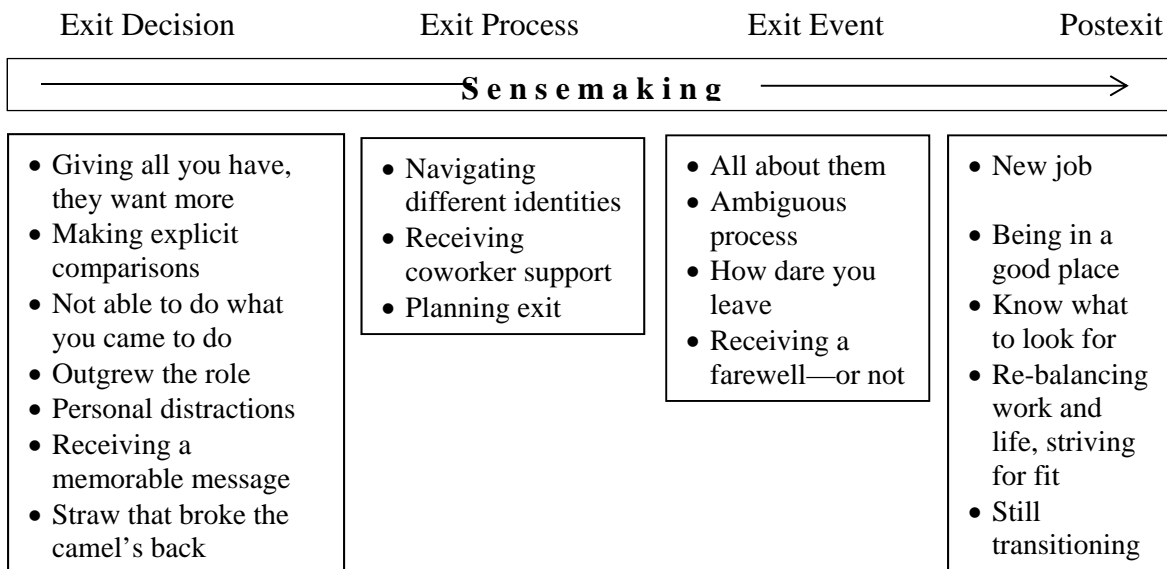


Figure 2: The Evolution of Exit Model

Exit Decision

The exit decision phase of this model reveals a myriad of experiences and observations that contribute to an exit decision. Participant narratives reveal that the exit decision is much more than a discrete event taking place within a short period of time. In most instances, the exit decision was a much longer term process during which the

individual was negotiating their sense of identification and professional identity. At first, the member is trying to find reasons to stay, while continuing to observe and experience troublesome organizational events and problematic interactions with coworkers, managers, and leaders—a combination of which ultimately led to an exit decision.

Rebecca shared that she planned her exit over a seven-year period beginning after the birth of her first child, which triggered her to begin questioning the amount of time and energy that her job as a director at a global technology firm was requiring of her. In contrast Chloe, a physical therapist and newcomer to full-time paid work, was with her organization for less than a year, yet experienced a variety of abusive interactions with her supervisor and her manager, one of which triggered her decision to exit. As described below, eight themes emerged to explain what led members to an exit decision. As illustrated in previous sections, some of these themes relate to shorter-term considerations, although others reflect a longer-term sense making process that eventually resulted in exit.

Giving All You Have, They Want More

This code reflects participants' realization that even though they have given the organization everything it has asked of them, the organization expects them to continue producing and/or sacrificing, despite the personal impact. This code also captures instances of expectations to risk one's personal health, as well as to sacrifice one's personal financial well-being for unfair or inadequate compensation. Brad was working long hours in extreme temperatures at his construction job digging out home foundations for only \$9 an hour when he discovered that a coworker doing the same job was making a dollar more an hour. Working under a new sales director, Mary's company suddenly

expected her to relocate from her home in Florida to the company's headquarters in Buffalo, New York, despite years of exceptional performance as a remote employee.

Making Explicit Comparisons

This code captures specific comparative thought processes related to exit, from reconciling their initial expectations for their current job, to comparing themselves to coworkers, setting exit plans into action, or receiving an unexpected job opportunity. Some of these factors led to a quick exit event, whereas other contributed to a slower exit-related decision-making arc. Rebecca considered her thoughts about exit against that of “the lifers” mindset, the term her coworkers used to describe the many employees who spent their entire careers at the company.

After beginning to teach part-time in addition to her full-time school psychologist role, Elise began comparing the impact she could make as a professor of school psychology compared to the impact she was able to make as an individual school psychologist:

I had been doing teaching on the side. I was like – I almost needed to make a shift. I was teaching one night a week and I thought, ‘I need to be doing school psychology in the schools one day a week and then teaching the other days.’ I think it ultimately made an impact on me because I think found that it’s hard to make a difference as one person – me being one psychologist, it’s hard to make a difference [in the schools].

Veronica understood that the owners of her small company had been left in a lurch when her previous manager quit unexpectedly, which is why they had quickly hired her distant and aloof new manager. She tried to “stick it out as long as I could.” Although Chase was concerned and a bit frustrated with chaotic working conditions, he had not thought seriously about exit until meeting a woman at a happy hour who, after discussing his work and educational background, gave him her business card and told

him to send her his resume. He got a job with the company, and within a few weeks had relocated from Texas to Washington.

Not Able to Do What You Came to Do

This code captures examples of feeling constrained by an organizational culture and/or working conditions that did not support one's profession or the way they felt their job should be done. In some instances, this frustration resulted from the chaos caused by change, poor leadership, or ineffective processes (as described previously), although for others it was a sense that nothing would ever change when they felt it should. Jack, a chef already frustrated by the restaurant owner's lack of willingness to purchase much-needed new kitchen equipment and his staff's lack of commitment to kitchen cleanliness, projected the future of his role to realize that he would never be able to achieve the professional goals he had for the role:

I would say the slow movement, the slow progress of things, I would put myself in the category of fast moving, getting things done immediately, as I feel motivated, and slow progress really deterred me. It made me feel like things weren't going to get done. I felt like the owner and I weren't speaking the same language. It was kind of a culmination of everything. I envisioned how the next six months would go if I stayed there. I took meditation classes, and I tried to be really mindful and create a visual picture in my mind of how I could be, how I would be maintained, how I would feel about myself. And all these issues, they were all contributing to a stress that I felt like would ultimately consume me. That stress that I envisioned months down the road was the defining thing that made me say, "You know what, this really isn't something that I want for my life. This isn't what I envisioned or what I hoped for. I got out of the restaurant after that."

Outgrew the Role

This code reflects the more gradual side of an exit decision, with participants noting that over time they simply found themselves less challenged by their role and saw no opportunity for professional growth. In some instances, this realization also involved

disappointment and frustration related to a salary that did not reflect their growth and enhanced contributions. Zach summarized this sensemaking process:

I don't know how many new fresh ideas I could have brought to the organization in that particular role. Likewise, I don't know how much more exciting it could have gotten. It was always fun to work an event. Art gallery openings, if you've ever been, are great social events. It's wonderful to see the art. I wanted to keep challenging my mind a bit. So, there was always that element, learning about the art. But I can do that in any part of the gallery. The actual role, I felt like I had brought all that I could, so it was time for a change. [And] not only was there no options for promotion, but there were also no merit increases offered during my time there. In four and a half years, I think there were two 1% raises. Even during the recession, it was not enough to keep up with inflation.

Recalibrating Priorities

This invivo code reflects sensemaking outcomes related to needing to place more on family issues. Kelly needed a job closer to her family and involved less emotional labor given that she was a single parent to a child with special needs. Rebecca became increasingly aware of the work-life example she was modeling for her children. John wanted a fresh start in a bigger city, away from the assumptions of what his coworkers thought of him, as well as demands from his extended family for which he frequently was the assumed problem-solver:

The Bible says a man receives no honor in his own home. Basically what that means is that there are so many things that are distracting and there's so many different views that are—or may be pulling you emotionally that I didn't feel like I could have a pure chance—a fair chance to do those things because of people's perception of who I am there. I decided the best thing would be to move to a place where I'm not known, where people could listen to what I'm saying as opposed to looking at who I am, who they perceive that I am.

Receiving a Memorable Message

This code reflects a myriad of pivotal messages that triggered exit-related sensemaking. Participants cited a number of sources of memorable messages, from

coworkers and bosses to friends, strangers, and even themselves. Some messages were general in theme but resonated with the individual at a particular point in time where others were more specific to exit, such as hearing coworkers talk about their own exit plans. Sara realized the message she shared with students in her advertising courses at the end of every semester was advice she herself should heed: “Leap and the net will appear.”

For Peter, a bar manager who was accused by his boss of stealing \$1200 from the bar and being refused the large bonus he had been promised when he accepted the position (which was intended to offset the lower than market salary he was being paid), after working excessive hours for months in order to build the company’s business, his wife shared a memorable message that released him from the pressure of trying to figure out what to do next:

So, whatever, they don’t fire me...but so at this point I’m bringing home much stress and my wife literally said these words to me. She said, “Free yourself.” And I was like, “What?” She said, “Just quit.” Because I’m the type of person that if I’m not working, I’m freaking out. I have to have a job, and I always end up with these silly jobs because I won’t quit a job unless I’ve got another one in line, and I had nothing planned, and I said, “Okay. I’m going to do it,” and I just quit. I said, “I can’t do this.” At this point now, I’m not getting paid the money that I was promised, and now I’m being asked to reimburse the safe for something [I did not do] - I wouldn’t steal money from my own bar. That’s the dumbest thing in the world. So I said, “I’m outta here.”

Straw That Broke the Camel’s Back

This code captures discrete events, whether a specific observation, realization or conversation, that solidified one’s decision to exit. Under significant stress, Rebecca “lost it” and snapped at her boss, who was also a close personal friend:

I did really make a mistake. And that was, towards the end, I was so overstressed and I couldn’t – I was just kind of breaking down, that I told my boss a little bit ahead of time. I bit at him one day. I just said something smart-assed and he was

like, “Are you okay? What’s going on with you?” And I was like, “I can’t do this anymore. I think I’m going to be leaving.” He was like, “Okay. Well, let me know.”

For some, the “straw” moment was generated by an event that questioned their personal integrity and/or violated their personal or professional ethics. Although she had been able to tolerate sexual harassment from the cooks in the kitchen, seeing the restaurant’s general manager do drugs in the restaurant was the final straw for Jane:

It definitely heightened and began to be really difficult after I was a manager for about two months when we opened that newest store and one of the last straw type of things is when I actually walked in and saw the general manager and one other guy doing cocaine in the restaurant in one of the side closets. I was just like, I can’t, I can’t be in here. I don’t know what is in this restaurant, where it is. If somebody comes in here, just working here, I felt like I could get in trouble for what they’re doing, so I finally just called them one day and I told them I was done. I couldn’t work there anymore.

Taking great pride in his profession as bar manager, Peter was deeply offended that the organizational that was refusing to pay him the bonus he had been promised and had manipulated him in other ways, was now accusing him of stealing money:

My ultimate reason for leaving was not getting paid properly, not getting the bonus and just the huge mess about missing money turned out to be basically feeling like I was being accused of taking it. I felt like if I went into my own pocket and gave them 600 bucks of my assistant manager throws in 600 bucks too, I felt like that was an admission of guilt. I was very adamant about saying, “I’m not going to pay any money because I didn’t take the money.” To me, “Here’s that money back,” that basically says, “Okay, well, Peter took the money, because he’s paying it back.”

Exit Process

The process sub-phase of exit occurs after the individual makes an exit decision and continues until after they leave the organization. During the process sub-phase, the exiter’s thoughts and communication focus on seeking to understand and reconcile what it means to be in the process of becoming a “former” member of the organization.

Individuals begin processing this identity shift as they plan the logistics of the exit event, and discuss exit with coworkers.

Navigating Shifting Identities

Participants' experienced a variety of identity negotiations, some letting go of one professional identity while simultaneously forming their next professional identity. Rebecca was mid-career corporate professional working full-time as she completed coursework towards her new career goal of transitioning to an academic career while still working as a director at a global technology company. As she began letting go of the "lifer" identity at her corporate employer, she was confronted with the realization that colleagues in her new profession did not hold her previous corporate professional identity in high regard, instead they expected her to quickly assimilate into the academic profession:

I wouldn't say they don't have respect for me, because they are very good people and everybody is very supportive. It's mostly they don't have respect for that accumulation of skills that I have [from my previous profession]. Whereas, at GlobalTech, I had gotten to a level of respect because of all the work I'd done there. Just like a professor at State U has now – when you meet them in the hallway, you give them the respect that they deserve because of all the work they've done for that company. And it's just weird to – you just give all that up. And it's hard. Everybody has an ego when you put that much into it.

Rebecca and others also had to explain to stayers why they were leaving while in some cases also reuniting with other leavers, a conglomeration of events requiring much identity work. Rebecca's corporate coworkers threw her a going away party attended by some of her former colleagues that had left the company months or years before:

Well, before it [exit] happened, they were like, "Yeah, yeah. We'll believe it when we see it." Because they know how hard it is to leave. Once I left...it was really funny because my going away party was also a Pedigree reunion. We double-dipped it. The guys that came from Pedigree were just so happy for me,

patting me on the back. The rest of the people that were still at GlobalTech were more subdued. I was just observing the whole thing.

Alexis' organization, similar to those of other participants, made it difficult for her to navigate the identity transition from her old job to her new job, as she was pressured to work at full steam up to the last very last minute:

I felt like I was being pimped out. I said, "You guys realize that in three days I'm not here anymore. I'm attending this meeting because you specifically asked me to. But creating this deliverable – I shouldn't be responsible for because I'm done in three days." They're like, "No, we want you to attend the meeting and we really want you to pull that together because we know you'll do a great job." "Great. Great, thank you." It just puts into perspective all the shit that I dealt with before.

In contrast, in separate incidents, Chloe's supervisor and manager made it very clear to her that she was no longer a member of the organization:

She [supervisor] scheduled herself to not be in the clinic on my last day. And my manager has not said a word to me since the meeting that he berated me in. He's never, to this day, said a word to me. We've seen each other at different functions. I went to the clinic's open house not long after I quit. Because I still liked all my co-workers and I wanted to support them, I went because I still care about them. Some of the people there were big influences on my life at the time in the area. And I didn't have friends, so they were my friends. They were the people you spend 40 hours a week with...I was expecting, at that point, that my manager would at least be cordial. He found he was walking towards me and he turned around and walked the other direction. I was like – Are you kidding me? Wow. That was weird.

Receiving Coworker Support—Or Not

From having a secret confidante, to receiving disconfirming responses about one's exit decision from coworkers, or warnings about what the exit process would be like, participants received and processed a range of supportive and non-supportive responses during the exit process. After returning from maternity leave and planning to exit, Alyssa had received both advance warning and surprise reactions from coworkers related to her boss' response to her exit announcement. As a result, she chose to tell the

company's HR manager first, who offered yet another warning about how Alyssa's boss would react to the news and framing Alyssa's decision to leave as a personal choice, rather than as a response to the ongoing abuse she had received from her boss, and the company's lack of flexible work arrangements and history of poor treatment of pregnant and parenting women:

On Wednesday I went to HR and she said, "I know what you're going to tell me." I said, "Yeah, I just need to be spending more time with my family." She said, "That's what I figured. I could see that that was starting to – I was starting to put that together and see that you need to be home. Every baby is different." She said, "Your boss is really going to have a stroke." She said it just like that. And I said, "Yeah." She said, "Well, I'll call her and let her know what's going on and then we'll go from there." I said, "Okay."

The day I quit, my boss went bananas and was really upset and they [coworkers] were very, very surprised. I quit knowing that she was going to tell me that. I'd given her two weeks' notice and I knew she was going to tell me my last day was the next day, "Don't bother coming in after that." Because that's her style. If you quit on her, she doesn't want to see you after that. And that's what happened. They were really surprised. "Why did she do that? Why is she treating you that way?" I was like, "It's okay. I expected that."

Planning Exit

Although some participants made a decision and then exited quickly, most reported taking special care to be very strategic in first aligning a host of personal and professional considerations related to their exit process. Emily and two of her coworkers worked together to help each other plan their exit:

One [teammate] was my age and female and the other could have been our father. He really could have retired had he wanted to. He had daughters our age and grandchildren, too. But the three of us realized that we clearly were not going to be able – even if things calmed down under Erica's reign, we were not going to be

able to fulfill what our personal and professional goals were. So, we supported each other in figuring out what that looked like – what was it that we cared about?...In a sense, it [supporting each others' exit planning] was like our true life vest at the moment. We served like compasses for one another, figuring out how we can get out of this situation and into a better one.

Participants also planned the specific logistics of their upcoming exit. Darren consulted with a vice president with whom he had worked, in order to identify his full range of options for exit after being targeted for investigation on false sexual harassment charges by his boss, subordinate and HR:

I actually started talking to the vice president and said, “Hey, what are my options?” We discussed several things. We discussed I could see about moving to a different team under him, because of what my team lead was doing and how he was behaving. I could move to the other vice president in the office — these two VP's reported to the senior vice president — because I'd worked for him on a couple projects off and on. So, I potentially could find some more work and report to the other vice president.

We also discussed severance because the vice president had been there 25 years. He'd seen the layoffs. He had started at the company straight out of college, and had seen it when it was a lot bigger. It actually used to be a stand-alone electronics company that was bought by this Korean company in the late '90s. So he had seen a lot of changes and he kind of knew what was coming. So, we talked about severance as well. We decided our best move was to ask for severance.

Chloe's exit experience was similar, but moved even more rapidly, after a surprise meeting with her supervisor and HR in which she was ambushed for going to HR a few days earlier with a genuine concern (and naiveté) about her manager expecting her to provide client services without having signed contracts on file:

After that meeting where they berated me, I literally went home, looked up career places and started putting my resume together. That was the turning point. Within two weeks of that meeting, I contacted a career place, had somebody write my resume for me, teach me how to interview. I had applied to six or seven jobs. It was a month after that meeting that I got my interview with Alara, where I'm working now. Less than a week after that, I put in my two-week notice. It was

very fast. After they did that to me in that meeting, that was the last straw. I had had it. I was like, “No way. No more.”

Exit Event

The final stage of the exit process internal to the organization involves preparing for, and communicating, one’s exit to the organization. This sub phase captures the exiter’s experience with the organization’s exit process, as well as handling other members’ responses to their exit announcement and/or future plans.

All About Them

This code represents conversations with one’s manager and/or the organization’s Human Resources staff that highlight the short-term inconvenience the exiter is causing for the organization while failing to acknowledge the significance of the event for the exiter or the individual’s value to the organization. This reaction is typically surprising and frustrating for exiters, who view the lack of personal acknowledgement as a final insult. Rita’s experience highlights this final manifestation of the Selfish System:

I had put my two weeks’ notice in, hoping that I could just leave, and I went into her [manager’s] office, and she was like, “Well, gosh, we’re just so disappointed.” She didn’t say we’re so disappointed — not that I did anything, but losing a good person. No, all she said was, “Oh, we finally found somebody. The process took so long, we finally found somebody” — it sounded like she was just mad that she was going to have to go through that process again.

After working two full-time positions for her boss for over a year, Mabel was surprised at her boss’ selfish response, “There was no panic mode. There was no, “What are we going to do? My deputy superintendent lost it. She did that, ‘I can’t believe you’re leaving me. What am I going to do without you?’”

Ambiguous Process

Some interviewees encountered an ambiguous exit process, one in which the organization’s process for handling resignations was unclear. In some instances, the

organizational representatives to whom exiting members communicated their exit were themselves not clear on the steps involved in the formal organizational exit process. Rebecca worked for an organization that individuals rarely left voluntarily, leaving her boss unsure about the process for handling exit:

When I went to tell my boss that I was leaving, to give him my two weeks' notice, he said, "Well, let me look on the internet to see exactly what we need to do for the exit package." I said, "Okay. Have you ever done this before?" He said, "No, I've never done this before. Nobody has ever quit." That right there is very telling about how once you're in the company and you have that – it's almost like a tenure, but it's different. They call it FTE, full-time employment, because a lot of people come in through contracts and they get converted to FTEs. And once you're an FTE, you're like in the realm of never going to quit. You're going to retire.

Peter faced difficulty in communicating his exit because of the organization's bureaucratic structure and the current climate of his relationship with the organization:

The response — it's always tough — to me it was tough to, I guess I wanted to quit in an ethical manner, but I had so many regional managers above me that it's like, who knows how to quit properly? I told Tim, "I quit," to Tim Vickers. Then Don, the owner, calls me on the phone and said, "You know, I wish you would have come to me." He said what he was supposed to say as a bar owner. Like, "I wish I could've helped you."

It was a very quick conversation. I don't think anybody was that surprised. They could tell I was frustrated at that point. None of them liked that I called my lawyer. I said, "Well, why wouldn't I? I need to know my rights. I don't know the rights in Texas. Can you fire me if I don't pay you back this magical money?" So, they didn't like that I involved a lawyer.

I think they were probably, at that point, maybe relieved that I was leaving, because I wasn't going to let them walk all over me for it. I don't think people like that want people that are going to take a stand to work for them. They want people that are going to say, "Okay, here's your money." So yeah, I don't think they were that surprised [that I was leaving].

Rick's exit was also complicated by a financial issue, in this case, the organization tried to make him return the sign-on bonus when he had joined the company one year earlier:

When you get on you get a \$5,000 bonus. If you pass the CPA within a year, you get this payout. I had passed it, so then they're saying, "You need to file your paperwork within a year and then after a year you can leave. We won't try to get the bonus from you." I filed the paperwork. I think I needed like two more weeks or something like that to work for them not to pull the bonus away from me. I had like two weeks of extra vacation that I could take and still be a member of this company. No, I'm going to do it the right way, give the right notice and everything else. I don't think they are going to try to take 5,000 bucks away from me.

Sure enough, they tried to. I got the partner involved on it. He stood up for me because I had worked tons of hours and everything else. Long story short, I kind of had a loyalty to him to finish out right as well, just because he stuck up for me there. As well, I had [relationships with] people I was working with on that particular engagement. As much as the company had kind of dragged me through the dirt and everything else, there was still some loyalty left, I guess, to do a good job.

Receiving A Farewell – Or Not

This code captures the final acknowledgement participants receive about their exit from other members. Participants used this final event as the capstone sensemaking source related to how the organization viewed them. Rick's farewell reinforced the expectation consistently communicated to him in multiple ways throughout his tenure and pressure from his team to keep working until the very end:

When I was leaving I told everyone on the engagement that I was on [at the time]. There were about five or six of us at a table, and I told them I'd be putting in my two weeks with a partner and everything. They were all sad to see I was leaving, but then like well — "But you're going to finish out your time here" kind of thing.

I was working like 60-hour workweeks or 70-hour workweeks, and you do, "Hey, it'd be nice to have — I'm only here for two weeks. I'm going to be outta here,"

but it's like I didn't want to put those people in a bad position, or burn a bridge with the partner, because it was actually the leading partner that had been engaged that I was on. I didn't want to sit there and like burn that bridge basically.

Alyssa's experience reflected the climate of her team as well, highlighting the isolation she had felt during her tenure. Only her newest teammates, rather than the coworkers she had worked with prior to her maternity leave, invited her out for a farewell lunch:

When I came back [from maternity leave], my team had changed and the reorganization had gone through and they hired all these new people. In the last seven weeks I was there, I got to know new people. They were really nice and they wanted to go out to lunch and they were taking outside classes together afterward. There were about five new people. On my last day, they said, "Let's go to lunch and celebrate your last day."

Then we went to lunch and I looked around the table and there were six people. And I was the only one who had been there before I went on maternity leave. Everyone else at that table was new since I went on maternity leave – so hired in the last five months or so. It was just really interesting because no one that I knew longer than that was there or wanted to be there or felt the need to go to lunch today. Good luck and fair thee well. It was only these new people. I hope they survive. I hope they're able to make it with each other. But I think they had a rude awakening.

Finally, Veronica's experience reflected the absence and silence she had always experienced from her new manager:

I found a new position, so I gave my manager two weeks' notice.

Q: How did that conversation go?

We really weren't able to contact him directly. We had to contact his assistant, and so I sent my two weeks' notice to his assistant. I spoke to her about it verbally, and then I sent her a written letter through email.

Q: Did you ever get any kind of response or acknowledgement from him personally or no?

No.

Postexit

This final phase of organizational exit represents the reconciliation an exiter achieves as a result of leaving a particular role, team and organization. Upon reflecting postexit, participants revealed a new understanding of the various forms of work involved in a job and what work meant to them. As a result, their narratives articulated a heightened sense of personal clarity regarding the type of job role that was the best fit for their skills, personal needs, and professional goals. Joe's experience reflects this sensemaking process:

I did learn a lot, the good and the bad of small businesses and how to treat people and how to kind of manage your own business and the dos and don'ts of that. I think ultimately, though, it probably pushed me more in a direction of wanting to be a part of something that's bigger and that wants to make a difference more than a small company. So, like I said, I'm glad I got to learn a lot about it, but I think in the end, it made me realize that I did want to be part of something bigger [and] that had a bigger mission than just the dollar sign for the owners.

Furthermore, many participants articulated a feeling of being allowed to "work differently" in their new roles, achieving a new sense of awareness of what work meant to them, providing them increased confidence in knowing what to look for when evaluating new and future employers, and more satisfaction with the work-life integration they had achieved postexit. Andie explains this reflection and learning:

I learned so many skills that I use today...the organization efforts, the delineation between personal and work, and how to really perform – let me think of how I want to say this – how to really ensure that the foundation is solid for your company before you branch out into other areas. I think that goes both on a professional and a personal basis.

I don't overextend myself because of having seen the negatives of that. I'm much more, even on personal level, I'm much more budget conscious than I ever had been before about not overextending myself. I think seeing those things first hand on a business level, makes me hyper sensitive to it. I'm very hypersensitive to paying bills on time. Because there are so many occasions when bills were not paid on time, where we were indebted to our vendors. I'm probably over-vigila

about paying them right on time or paying them ahead of time. I owe you money, so let me give you that money right now. My personal CPA. I want to pay him right away so that he doesn't think that I have any tendencies that my former business had.

New Job

Comments about their new jobs indicated that participants felt they were now allowed to work differently. Comments highlighted feeling respected, experiencing supportive structures and communication practices, experiencing professional growth, and having autonomy. Some also referred to adjusting to a different pace of work. In total, these factors contributed to feeling like their new jobs left them with a good sense of fit between their new roles and their skills, values and professional goals. Marty's new job involved a change of industry from global wholesale supply chain to working a marketing leadership position for a national home builder. The change capitalized on his drive to impact the financial bottom line for his employer, met his expectations regarding appropriate compensation for his contributions, and allowed him to do work that was a passion for him:

I've always been a fan of architecture. Going back to my days at State U, even my roommate was an architecture student. I've built several houses personally, I've built income property for me personally over the years, so I've kind of been entangled in home building and real estate investing and things like that on a personal level and just have always had a kind of a passion for it and it seemed like this would be something I would enjoy. When we are able to be successful is when we are doing something we enjoy and have a passion for. And if we're not successful at it, at least it's more fun.

[Now], I'm in the home building industry and I do sales and marketing. I'm perfectly happy with the way it's structured because I am compensated on how the business grows and if the business grows, I make a lot of money, and if I don't, I know that it's all on my shoulders. I'm very happy about that kind of structure. I control my own investment, I reap my own rewards, I suffer in my own failures.

Jim had grown so used to the isolation and silence experienced as a virtual worker that he was skeptical of the open, collaborative and employee-focused culture of the large local credit union where he was now working. He explained how he decided to test the organization's frequently espoused value of open communication by emailing the credit union president to commend a coworker and was surprised by the result:

To me, it's amazing all these walls, just easy to break. In fact, they're not even there. The walls are not there...I sent an email. He [company president] sends back an email, copies her. [Now] I know he knows her, he knows me. She's doing a great job. We know that. Thanks for writing the email. Duly noted. This is the kind of thing that we love to see. We like to see her doing a good job, you doing a good job, you recognizing her doing a good job—the whole thing is just like a big group hug. And that's what we want. That's what we like. That's the focus of our business. It's completely night and day from having a boss that you've never met.

As Jim's experience highlights, for many, sensemaking for their new job was achieved through comparisons to their old job. Sara noted both similarities and differences between her former job as college instructor and her new job as a real estate agent in terms of their fit with her skills and her evolving career goals:

On the surface, it feels like a night and day difference. What I like about it, so far – and I'm only a year into it, and only three months into doing it full-time. There's a degree of counseling that I think I realized is essential to anything I do. That face to face interaction is so necessary for me to feel happy in what I do. You're meeting a client. You're showing a home. There are big differences. Also, I feel challenged. So, face to face interaction and feeling challenged, in a way that isn't completely overwhelming, are two things that I realized are necessary for me. But also, there was a flexibility and autonomy that I had at State U that I also have here. That's the third thing that is necessary for me.

Unfortunately, not everyone found their new job to be an improvement. John was initially excited to get a fresh start, leaving the manufacturing line of a clean energy manufacturer in his small hometown, to working at the factory line of a large global beverage company in a much larger city two hours away. However, soon after starting his new job he was written up for coming to work after having his eyes dilated at a doctor's

appointment earlier that day during treatment for a severe eye issue related to his diabetes. He had asked his supervisor for a special pair of safety glasses after reporting for his shift, since as a new employee he did not yet qualify for paid time off. This harsh treatment caused him to reminisce about his old job, where he had experienced a steady flow of racism as the only African American employee:

I felt like it [exited job] wasn't worth my time anymore. I ended up deciding that – “Well it's probably time to go.” I could have stayed there and worked – it actually wasn't too bad. The hours were like 12 hours. And for a while we were working quite a bit of overtime. But it was nothing like it is now. Where I work at now is brutal. I mean, absolutely brutal. I'm learning about the culture of the place. The culture is horrible, absolutely horrible. Thirteen days on, one day off. Expectation is work, work, work. You can't even take a day off to go to the hospital. If you get sick, you're done.

Being In A Good Place

Participants shared many thoughts on now being in a good place. The definition of this phrase had many different meanings, from knowing their own professional value, to having a new job that was a good fit for their interests, to working in a culture that was positive, caring and supportive of employees. Nora felt she was in a metaphorical good place after transitioning from a role as an accountant for a yacht manufacturer to a college accounting instructor. She commented with pride on what she learned about herself as the result of the numerous financial reporting ethics battles she had with her former employer:

I realized that I learned a lot about myself, about my own strong ethical standing. And I realized certain things about what I do want to do and what I don't want to do. I don't necessarily want to do that particular line of work again for now. I really want to do something different. And it really helped me to realize my strong ethics because faced with certain situations, I had to stand up for myself. I realized that I have those kind of skills, that I could easily be able to assert myself. That was a good experience, to learn to assert myself and stand up for what I know is right. It gave me some confidence. Now that my children are grown up, I

don't feel tied to that kind of job. I don't have to sacrifice my career to raise my children anymore. That's behind me.

For Jane, the restaurant where she now worked was literally a "good place," offering a culture much different than the sexual harassment, on-site management drug use, and abusive leadership she experienced at her previous restaurant:

I would definitely say it was a complete 180. My coworkers, the other waitresses and waiters I work with, they were all friends together and then work there, so it feels really different. The manager, he used to wait tables there, so they've all been there for twenty years. They look at you like family or like their grandkid. They actually take care of you. Any time you're sick and you call in, they understand. It was sleeting the other day, they let us leave early because they cared about us and you can see that genuineness coming out of the company and it makes me feel a lot more comfortable. If I have an issue with somebody, I don't feel scared to tell one of the managers. They'll just come in and they'll go take care of it and they actually care about what's going on.

However as noted previously, not everyone felt they had landed in a good place. Similar to John's experience with the big city factory, after voluntarily changing jobs several times within just a few years, Sally realized postexit that despite her 17-year career as a purchasing manager, she was now trapped in a pool of low wage jobs because she did not have a college education:

I didn't have any degree, I just had a lot of years of experience, and I don't think they really care about that. Everything is very specialized. Even though I had all those years of purchasing, here I am in a place that has a lot of manufacturing purchasing jobs, but they didn't see the purchasing that I did in the casino/hotel industry as being relative to manufacturing purchasing. I couldn't get interviews for those jobs, which probably would have paid more. You've got to have that degree. And not having that degree has made it impossible for me to retire, because I didn't have job security. I think I would have had better job security in the corporate job that I had for many years. I may not have lost that job if I would have had more education. I don't know that that's necessarily true, but it would have been easier to find another job when I lost that one.

Know What To Look For

This code represents a variety of factors members learned to look for before seeking their next job. Factors included compensation that was fair given the amount and types of work required, to realizing the need for specific forms of organization support, and trusting their own gut related to their early observations about the organizations values and priorities. Lisa gained clarity on not only what he wanted for a job but what she wanted for her career:

I want to have a career that allows me to work remotely at times or on a project basis. Something that gives me more freedom to have the life I want. I don't want to be stuck in an office or working for somebody else from 9:00-6:00 and then beyond when they need me to work late and things like that. I don't want to. It made me realize that I would give up—it made me realize that working for a big company and being their indentured servant is not all it's cracked up to be. I'd rather work in a way where I can be an attendant and consult and do freelance—just more flexibility.

Emily gained the clarity and confidence to articulate for her employer what she is looking for in a supervisor-subordinate relationship:

I am very cautious about the relationship I have with my supervisor now. I try really hard to describe the type of environment that I work best in so that we can have a mutual understanding. I feel like I have a better radar sense of if—I'm just in tune to certain changes within organizations now. I know that I will never—I've made a promise and commitment to myself to never be in a work environment that toxic again because of the impact that it had on my personal life and my health. And so I feel a little stronger that I can get out of something if it ever had to come to that. I hope it never does.

After working several years for a university museum without a pay raise, Zach summarized why compensation is an important consideration, even for those pursuing a calling:

What's more important—the money or the professional satisfaction? I think that's the age old question. It needs to be a balance of both. I guess that's the difference between a job and a career and a calling. I enjoy my career. I'm not sure if I think it's a calling. I guess maybe I need some more years to reflect on that. But at the

same time, your career is a job and it needs to pay the bills and it needs to keep up with inflation.

Rebalancing Work And Life, Striving For Fit

Participants shared a heightened, conscious desire to establish and maintain a true balance between their work and their personal lives, rather than seeking fulfillment through their jobs and giving their personal lives what was left. Rebecca realized the personal cost of having so much of her identity being tied to her job:

I probably learned a lot about myself and the way that I treated my career. I have a personality where I want people to like me and to appreciate me. I would say it's sort of like a codependent personality, where I just am constantly going to try and work to make you think that I'm a valuable person. I realize that at any company – it's not just GlobalTech—any job will never be satisfied with everything that you give it. You have to be the one to control that – how much you're willing to give. Because you can give and give and give and give.

At the end of the day, you have to know what you're going to get back out of it. Which is a really selfish thing to think of and it's hard for me to think that way because it feels very selfish. But if you don't look after your own health and life, nobody else will. They'll let you give everything to it. And it's not 'they' because it's not one person. And that's the weird thing, for me my mental vision when I'm working is there's one person here that I'm doing this for—but there's not. It's not like your boss is the person that's going to get value out of what you're doing. He's got a million other things that he's doing. So, it's not like one person that's going to give you validation. You have to search that within yourself.

With a full career's worth of working experience under his belt, nearing retirement, and with an elderly parent he was caring for, Paul's priority was clear to him throughout his tenure as a traveling bank auditor, as well as after his exit:

Life is too short to be that devoted to a job. A job is important because you need to earn money, but your family comes first as far as I'm concerned. Especially at this age. If I were younger, I was just starting off, I probably would have not been quite as independent-thinking, if you will.

Chloe, a physical therapist, as well as a young wife and new mother, described the clarity she gained about her priorities as a result of the demands and abuse she experienced at her first full-time paid job:

I learned from that job that it's a job, nothing more. I cannot constantly give myself over to it and still be a good wife and a good mom because my thoughts and my energy cannot be surrounded in my work performance and those things. They need to be surrounded on what's really going to pay off. I'm not saying that I don't need to work hard. Not saying that. Just saying that when I'm at work, I need to work hard and I need to be a good employee. But when I'm at home, I need to be at home and be a good wife.

And no matter where I'm at, I always need to be a good wife and a good mother. I can't think, no matter where I'm at, I need to be a good employee. Because my company isn't going to be with me until the end. They're a company. They do not, in fact, see themselves like that. I'm their employee. It's a difference. I work for them and they pay me. That's what I learned. I know that's kind of sounds like heartless and cold, but you work better with a clear mind, I think, when you check all that other stuff.

Still Transitioning

This code refers to participants who were still keeping in contact with coworkers or other former employees of the organization, as well as those who were still deciding on their next career move. Although she had transitioned from her job at the credit union to a manager role at a local sport venue, Rita still wondered about how she might explain her exited job during future job interviews:

I don't know if I'm going to leave that off my resume. I think I might, and then if someone asks, "Oh, what were you doing?" I'd just say, "Oh, I had a position in the marketing department at the local credit union, I was only there a couple months. I didn't have any major responsibilities, so — just leave it off my resume, that's for sure, because I'm not proud of it. There's nothing I can actually speak to that I did anything, I'm not very proud of it.

Jacob was still keeping in touch with a number of coworkers still working at the organization, as well as other former members. His comments reflected his continued

connection to the emotional climate of the organization and sympathy for those he left behind:

And when they started to squeeze and just making decisions to do the hiring freeze and to try and squeeze the office. It's literally half of what it was and the work was the same. My four bosses were really stressed out because of people just quitting left and right. There have been five [quit] in the last two weeks and these are pretty important divisions that you can't just walk in and pick up. It takes years of experience.

But now it's more—the discussion is about the people that are still there and that are leaving. My guy that I hired from – he'd been an intern with me and then he went to Chicago and went to Ernst & Young. I got him to come back and he said he can't continue to do this. I just talked to him the other day—he said he worked until 3:00 in the morning the other night. You can't continually [work like that] — you eventually just get worn down. It's time for him to go. I think everybody's feeling that way.

After leaving her job at a large New York advertising agency, Lisa was doing some contract work and preparing to attend UX training through General Assembly. She was excited by the opportunity to “do the work” rather than the “schmoozing”:

The one thing I got from the last job—what excites me is that this [UX] is tangible. It's not like in marketing and branding, the [focus on] winning personalities and so much bureaucracy—like who's in charge, who knows who. I'm sorry I'm not the daughter of the CEO of Monster. You're not going to listen to me. Fine. I just found that in marketing, it was so much more this schmoozing and who you know and who you can influence.

Now I'm going into UX [programming], it's a hybrid—you have to understand the business and you have to understand the consumer. But then you actually have to apply it. That's where the rubber meets the road. What I like about it is I'm building something tangible, but you need to know a little bit about coding. I feel like the tech field and coding is not about influence. It's about actually being able to do the work. I'll be happy to have a manager who's doing all the schmoozing and all the butt-kissing and whatever and call it networking. But I want to be doing the work.

CONCLUSION

Narratives in each of the codes comprising exit highlight a highly communicative process characterized a large degree of sensemaking focused on enhancing self-awareness and clarifying one's work-related values. As these participant narratives illustrate, the communicative processes employees use is much more complex, and involves much more sensemaking (Weick, 1995), than captured by the previous conceptualization of exit as a discrete, static stage.

Instead, the interview excerpts comprising this chapter illustrate that employees are very productive in communicative terms—first, as they seek understanding how to fit in with organizational culture and navigate its changing structures—and secondly, in how they discuss and plan their organizational exit. In fact, employees planning exit were quite creative and persistent in first trying to align themselves to the organization's expectations for assimilating new members, exhausting available organizational structures, and then creating their own connections as necessary—up to and including personalizing their own organizational exit process.

Chapter 11: Discussion

Offering a challenge to managerial discourse that often privileges the perspective of management, as evidenced by the concept of the “disengaged employee” prevalent in the popular press (Morgan, 2014; Taylor, 2014), findings of this study reveal that employees are proactive, creative, and persistent in their sensemaking and communicative attempts to create rationality among chaos and frustration. In these ways, workers at all levels, from interns to high level managers, are redefining what it means to be a professional, navigating shifting bureaucracies and leveraging and building networks, all while completing their role-specific work. This section will summarize the main contributions of the research in this dissertation. The following pages detail the key findings and contributions, implications for practice, and limitations offered by this study.

KEY FINDINGS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

The findings of this study increase awareness of the various types of communicative work that employees do in service to their organizations, responding rationally to organizationally imposed changes and leadership demands that are often anything but rational. Examining employees’ efforts to make sense of organizational changes and constraints, up through and including their exit decisions and postexit sensemaking, provides new insight—from the employees’ perspective—into the relationship between organizational structures, communication and employee agency.

Exit as a Positive Form of Voice

This study also represents a significant update to EVLN model. Similar to the recent work by Bashshur and Oc (2014), the findings of this research highlight many positive behaviors not fully reflected in the current EVLN model. These communication

behaviors include information seeking, provision of social support, and the act of exit itself. Ultimately participants in this study left not as a final outcome of job neglect, but rather as a positive expression of voice and, in some instances, an expression of their commitment to professional ethics. As detailed in the findings section, many participants tolerated ongoing abuse from leaders, managers, and/or coworkers, in addition to navigating problematic systems and a lack of organizational support specific to their job responsibilities. After experiencing one or more of these factors over an extended period of time individuals took a stand for themselves, as well as for the organization—in the form of organizational exit (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006).

Specifically, participants' postexit narratives indicate that their sensemaking was still very much focused on wanting to be in a position that enabled them to use their technical skills, to be respected and appreciated for their personal ethics, and also allowed them to make a meaningful contribution to the organization through their daily work. When, after a period of sensemaking, they were not able to achieve these goals in their current organization, participants used exit as a form of voice, communicating through their exit that they were no longer able to stand by and see the organization neglect not only them and their role, but also the organization itself.

This reframing of employee exit from disengaged, neglectful behavior to positive expression of voice represents a significant contribution both theoretically and practically. Currently, Jablin's (1987, 2001) model does not account for the role of individual sensemaking, pre-exit attempts at voice, or the toll of emotional labor associated with the outsider status that often precedes an exit decision. It should also be noted that not all participants departed out of frustration with the organization. For example, participants Chris, Sue and Anne left for personal reasons unrelated to their job situations. Chris got married and decided to move out of state with his wife to live in a

less urban area more conducive to the outdoor activities they enjoyed as a couple, Sue relocated to live with her husband at his new military post, and Anne decided to stay home with her two small children and plan for more. Although these situations represent the positive narratives exiting individuals often construct and share with their organizations during exit, comments from these three individuals that they were not dissatisfied with their workplaces, rather they were each entering a new phase of their personal life which required a location or job transition.

Enhanced Understanding of Communicative and Non-communicative Aspects of the Exit Process

Findings of this study indicate that exit is a highly personalized phase of the socialization process, when individuals finalize de-identification (Ashforth, 2001) and consciously turn away from the organization's attempts at assimilation. During exit, members also begin escalating thoughts and plans about leaving the organization and imagining what their personal and professional lives will be like post-membership. This process is constructed through sensemaking and communication with other organizational members, as well as outsiders like family members, throughout the four sub-phases of exit detailed in the Evolution to Exit model, including exit decision, exit process, exit event and postexit.

Certain stages of exit are particularly communicative—namely, the decision, process and event stages of exit, when exiting individuals receive and send many different types of messages related to their exit decision. One example is the “straw that broke the camel's back” message received from the organization or a specific member, which is typically a shock to exiters and facilitated or solidified by an exit decision. Beyond these surprises, whether witnessing unethical behavior by organizational leaders,

or receiving some type of abusive communication, participants sent and received a variety of direct and implicit messages that shaped their individual exit processes.

Conversely, postexit is more internal and less communicative. Here, participants engage in sensemaking on their own, with much less communication with others. During postexit, they mentally process their experiences as an organizational member, with a heightened focus on the saliency of the exit experience. Individuals who transitioned directly to another job (the vast majority of participants in this study) frequently noted comparing a potential new job directly against their exited position, looking for the opportunity to apply their professional skills, work for an organization that value and respected its members as individuals (rather than a “replaceable” part), and would not demand sacrifice of their personal time or health.

The insights detailed above illustrate that the socialization process is more a series of recursive and intersecting loops that connect the stages of socialization back to each other. Additionally, these loops connect forward, linking the exit from one organization to one’s expectations and evaluations of their future workplace. In this way, the exit from one job serves as a sensemaking lens for the anticipatory socialization of one’s next workplace, and represents the early stages of anticipatory organizational socialization for one’s next job. These findings highlight opportunities for additional study of exit-related communication processes beyond an existing focus on the immediate exit-event (Klatzke, 2008; Klotz, 2013). Exploring new dimensions of organizational exit research will help expand the theoretical and practical value of exit-related communication research.

Influence of Postexit Sensemaking on Career Choices

Participant insights offered in the exit and postexit phases of the new model of organizational exit proposed here highlight not only the sensemaking connections

individuals make between the experience of exiting one job and the anticipatory socialization phase of one's next job and organization, but also shape their longer-term longer-term career expectations and goals. Overall, this new exit model comprised of exit decision, exit process, exit event and postexit shifts and broadens our understanding of exit beyond discrete, specific exit-related communicative exchanges, instead placing a heightened focus on the role of the organization's indirect, informal and ongoing influence on an individual's understanding of the relationship between the organization, their work, their career, and their overall life.

The forward-looking focus of postexit sensemaking also provides further evidence of prospective sensemaking challenged by Weick (1969), but advocated by some current sensemaking researchers (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). This broadened focus makes sense in light of the more frequent job changes and layoffs many workers experience in today's ever-changing global economy, and individuals' requisite focus not just on their current job, but on sensemaking related to the "lessons learned" in a particular job and how this experience fits in with one's longer-term career goals.

Using Qualitative Research to Explore the Complex, Ongoing and Overlapping Forms of Change Today

In this study, participants reported experiencing not just a single change but many small scale and large scale changes simultaneously. As one example, school psychologist Nicole experienced three leadership changes in a month, including the unexpected death of one leader, and ongoing coworker tensions related to favoritism she and others perceived their new manager exhibited to younger, newer members like himself. All of this was in addition to navigating intense process requirements and deadlines for her job, while traveling to multiple schools and working with multiple sets of teachers, administrators and parents to deliver health services to a full caseload of students with

special needs. Overall, the findings of this research point to an opportunity to more fully explore exit-related sensemaking as it emerges from the complexity of members' on-the-job experiences, particularly for those who must navigate multiple macro and micro changes simultaneously over an extended period of time. This broader, deeper exploration of exit will add valuable depth to our current understanding of both organizational change and individual exit-related sensemaking. When examining exit at this individual level, we can explore the ways in which all exit is planned exit (Davis & Myers, 2012).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

This study offers several helpful insights for practitioners inside organizations today:

ROLE OF AMBIGUITY IN INCREASINGLY GEOGRAPHICALLY DISPERSED, UNDER-RESOURCED ORGANIZATIONS

Individuals in all types of organizations and across all levels of the hierarchy expressed stress and frustration with the lack of support, and even thwarting, of their attempts to solve the problems facing today's increasingly complex, under-staffed organizations. Luke, a building maintenance technician often could not find his supervisor or manager, nor did he have a coworker available for jobs that for safety reasons were supposed to be performed by team members. In fact, he was typically the only man scheduled on his shifts. Jacob, an accounting manager for a national finance organization, tried to help out-of-state leaders understand the value of his team's work and the risk associated with drastic reductions in staff and resources that his remote leader applied to his site. The ambiguity and assumptions prevalent in these two cases (and others) was driven by a need to keep labor and other overhead costs down in an era

of hyper profit-focused organizations. The findings of this study highlight the many levels of risk this focus presents to the financial health of organizations, as well as the physical and psychological health of its members.

Putting the “Human” Back in Human Resources

The impact of ambiguity in organizations underscores the need for appropriate levels of organizational support. As highlighted by several participants, organizations appear to be at significant risk in using human resource to ensure organizational predictability rather than authentically resolve ethical issues, support employee voice and professional growth, and provide employee advocacy. The privileging of existing organizational power structures by Human Resources professionals discussed in this study is troubling. Without a trusted advocate outside their superior-subordinate relationship, newcomers like Chloe, who was not only new to the organization but also new to the paid workforce, are left alone to navigate complex, risky unethical situations carried out by their direct managers and leaders. As noted previously, Chloe was not the only participant required to navigate difficult relationships and ethical dilemmas. Ironically, the study of Human Resources professionals and policies is currently underrepresented in organizational communication research and these issues represent a rich vein of future research.

HOLDING LEADERS AND MANAGERS ACCOUNTABLE FOR PEOPLE-FOCUSED COMMUNICATION AND ACTIONS

Building on the need to have more employee-centric human resource practices, organizations must also hold leaders and managers to a higher standard of communication-based leadership. The depth of the findings related to problematic leadership and management underscores the need for training and accountability related

to how to “walk the talk” of organizational values, while encouraging, supporting, and acting on expressions of employee voice. Although this may seem obvious, it is important to note that employee voice can be uncomfortable for leaders to accept, because: 1) it challenges their assumptions about the organization (and their leadership of it), 2) it may contradict their personal experiences as a high- ranking, privileged organizational member, and 3) it can generate significant, uncomfortable and time-consuming cultural work for the organization (Van Dyne et al., 2003). However, encouraging open expression of employee voice is vital to maintaining an employee-focused culture and retaining talented, experienced members who are passionate about contributing to the success of the organization. The corporate idiom “our employees are our greatest asset” could not be truer, yet the majority of participants in this study did not report receiving the appreciation or respect one would expect if their organization acted in accordance with this statement.

LIMITATIONS

In addition to its many strengths, the study also has a few key limitations. First, the breadth of the study, although a strength, is also a weakness. Because the participant pool was so broad, there is opportunity to further explore the exit-related sensemaking among various subgroups and employer types in more depth. For example, although the presence of both public sector and private sector participants provided initial insight into similar economic-driven shifts in organizational priorities across seemingly disparate organizations, there is now opportunity to more fully explore the differences that can exist in the pre-exit experiences and sensemaking of public sector and private sector employees. Similarly, there is opportunity to explore exit-related sensemaking differences between new hires and more tenured employees. As highlighted by Dailey’s

(2014) study of the role of internships as a mechanism for new hire socialization, the concept of relative tenure (Rollag, 2004, 2007) can make a significant difference in an employee's sensemaking abilities, and in the context of the current study, their organizational exit experiences.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study offers several insights related to the future direction of studying organizational exit. As described in the updated model of organizational exit, the exit process can be traced back much farther in the socialization process than previously explored. These findings indicate many opportunities for linking socialization and careers research, specifically, exploring how sensemaking skills gained over the duration of a career influences career choices (Brown, Kornberger, Clegg, & Carter, 2010; Buzzanell & Goldzwig, 1991; Cheney, Lair, Ritz, & Kendall, 2010; Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

Findings from the postexit phase specifically highlight how members shift from focusing on past-oriented, organization-specific sensemaking to much more personal, future-oriented, prospective sensemaking (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015) related to the assimilation tactics and organizational values sought in a future employer—and throughout one's future career. On topic for future research is to examine the individual "lessons learned" at each job—and the collective knowledge acquired as a result of frequent job changes. For example, recent college graduates in this study (as well as an earlier pilot study) retrospectively questioned their college major choice and career choices after repeatedly changing jobs after less than a year in each position and before they achieved metamorphosis in any single organization.

Additional exit research can also be conducted in a variety of industries and across a variety of job titles. This research will help scholars further identify and connect the similarities and differences that exist within and across organizations related to the overall socialization process, organizations' strategies for achieving member assimilation, and the process of de-assimilation and personalization of one's exit experience. Understanding of these practical and theoretical connections is limited when studying only a single group of employees (new hires, managers, etc.) or single occupational categories (pilots, nurses, etc.). Similarly, it is important to further explore the exo-level factors that connect all organizations, including broader economic and rhetorical pressures, as was highlighted in the current study's identification of the influence of U.S. economic conditions that existed during the time that participants exited their jobs. Given the rapidly changing economy and the influence these changes can have on organizational structures, values and priorities, it can be helpful to more explicitly account for the influence of broader economic conditions in future organizational communication research.

Finally, organizational communication research should be careful not to overly-privilege "leadership" and "innovation" when considering the role of change in organizational assimilation and exit. Particularly for newer employees and those in larger corporate organizations focused on ever-increasing profits, change can have a dark side. A full-scale embrace of change and all that it represents in terms of "progress," "leadership," and "innovation," comes at the cost of stress, exhaustion and job insecurity for many individual workers. Particularly in larger organizations, there is often not just one discrete change with a clear beginning and definite end. Employees in larger organizations must navigate a steady stream of both micro and macro level changes that can negatively impact member socialization and take a heavy toll on members over time.

Finally, on a related note, opportunity exists to increase the study of smaller micro changes and their influence on members' socialization experiences, such as the restructuring of a particular team or the introduction of a new policy and how the concurrent implementation of larger scale changes impacts those micro-changes.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the evolving nature of organizational exit, and the influence of broader economic factors on a variety of structural and relational shifts occurring within organizations today. As organizations continue to evolve and change, so does the need to explore the various ways individuals make sense of, communicate across, and work within them. This study, and future related research, can play a valuable role in both expanding our understanding of organizational socialization, assimilation and exit processes and identifying practical solutions for helping leaders and managers build organizations that support the professional contributions and personal well-being of their members.

I would like to end on a reflexive note. As noted at the beginning of this dissertation, I experienced many of these issues during my more than ten year career in the consulting, healthcare and technology industries. I observed every day how hungry employees at all levels were for managers and leaders who knew—really knew—their people's skill sets, career goals and personal passions inside and outside of work. People want to make a difference, they want to feel supported in taking smart risks, in applying their skills to meaningful, challenging work that produces real benefit for their organizations. People want recognition for these efforts and accomplishments, and they want to connect with others inside and outside their organizations to further develop

professional skills, expand their networks, and increase their capability to contribute to the ongoing success of their organizations.

Working in the fields of employee training and employee communication, I heard these goals and frustrations from employees every day. Yet, ironically, I was also always struck by the amount of hand wringing among leaders and managers around the topic of “disengaged employees” —also a common topic in the popular press. Once in the midst of a long-term ongoing merger, I was surprised when my boss, the senior vice president of corporate communications, told me she did not want me distributing the over 400 pages of narrative employee comments received during our most recent employee survey to company managers. All of the employees’ frustrations with the merger and their practical, often easy to implement ideas for making things better would stay trapped on the page, seen by less than ten people across a global organization of more than 14,000 employees. I wondered why we had bothered to ask our employees to do the survey if we were not going to get the information out to the managers and leaders who could make positive changes happen for their people.

I wondered then, as I still do now, when leaders will realize that employees do not typically start their careers—or individual jobs—as disengaged. They do not walk into a job interview and say, “I have a bad attitude,” “I do not want to work,” “I have nothing to offer you.” However, too often, organizational managers, leaders, and Human Resources professionals deflect fault, blaming individual employees for the outcomes of the systems in which they are forced to operate. Ironically, I have worked in several organizations that proudly proclaimed that “Our people are our greatest asset,” while those same leaders make choices that ruptured relationships and broke employees’ trust in the organization. However, in contrast, I have seen dynamic, people-centered leaders who spend their days talking with their people, clearing roadblocks for them, and creating

opportunities for them to grow and develop, while helping them use their skills to make a meaningful contribution to organizational success.

Understandably, given the pace and complexity of organizations today, it can be difficult to identify the specific problematic behaviors at hand for a given organization, as well as the seemingly little everyday occurrences that can build employee trust and motivation. Through this project, my goal was to give voice to people from a wide range of job types, industries and levels. I was quite surprised to hear the similarities that existed between the experiences among these different groups, from individuals in executive leadership positions, to those in front line roles. Member in each group felt replaceable and perceived their organizations were often focused on “making things look good on paper.” It is my hope and mission to both make a meaningful contribution to an updated theoretical understanding of organizational exit, and to help individuals and organizations apply these findings in a way that will build more people-centric, consistent, and nurturing organizational systems that will truly leverage people’s skills, desire to engage, and make a real difference for their organizations and their communities.

Appendix A: Interview Schedule

Opening: Thank you for your time today. I am conducting a study related to why people leave a job. The interview will take approximately 45 – 60 minutes. The information you will provide will be confidential and anonymous. Your name and the name of your previous or current employers will not be associated with your responses.

Before we begin, what pseudonym would you like me to record with your responses instead of your actual name? _____. Great, thank you. Let's go ahead and get started....

RAPPORT QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about your line of work – what do you do?
 - What do you enjoy about your work?
2. What was your last job?
 - How long did you work for that company?

PRIMARY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

3. Can you tell me about a time that reflected how things were for you at work when you first started your last job.
 - At first, did you feel like the company and you were a good fit? Why/why not?
4. How about a specific time when things were going well for you at work?
 - What was happening? What did you enjoy most about that time?
5. Was there a specific time when things were not going so well for you at work?
 - If so, what was happening? Why was this a troubling time?
6. How about a time when things were changing at your last job.
 - What is an example of a change that occurred?
 - How did people feel about how the organization handled these changes?
 - Did this particular change impact *your* sense of fit with the organization? If yes, how so?
 - (*If employed at the same organization for many years...*) Did the pace of change vary over time?
7. Was there a specific time when you started feeling different about the organization? (If yes, tell me a little bit about that...)
 - In what ways, if any, did you attempt to make your concerns known?
 - What made speaking up or taking action potentially difficult?
 - What was the response? Outcome?

- Was there a specific event or series of events that made you question if this was the place you wanted to be?
8. If applicable for you, tell me about a time when you started to question if the organization's values matched your personal values?
 - *If feels question is not applicable* - tell me about why, even with these changes, you still felt the organization reflected your values – or you weren't concerned with the company's values.
 9. Ultimately, what was your reason for leaving?
 - To what degree did your experience on this job have a lasting impact on how you view work as part of your life?
 10. Looking back, what would advise the organization to do differently?
 11. How did your experience at this company influence your overall thoughts about your work and career as part of your life?

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